DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 410 169 SO 028 089

AUTHOR	Foote, Allison; And Others
TITLE	MFA Connections: Three Themes for Teacher-Guided Visits to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
INSTITUTION	Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA.
SPONS AGENCY	National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	93
NOTE	88p.; Photographs may not reproduce clearly.
AVAILABLE FROM	Department of Education, Teacher Resources, Museum of Fine Arts, 465 Huntington Avenue, Boston, MA 02115 ($15).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Ancient History; *Art; Art Activities; Art Criticism; *Art Education; *Art History; Cultural Context; Foreign Countries; High Schools; Instructional Materials; Interdisciplinary Approach; Material Culture; *Museums; *Mythology; Non Western Civilization; Power Structure; Secondary Education; Teaching Guides; Units of Study; Visual Arts; Western Civilization
IDENTIFIERS	China; Egypt; Greece

ABSTRACT

This teacher resource packet encourages exploration of history and culture through art images. The packet consists of three units: "Daily Life around the World," which explores the rituals of daily life in ancient Egypt, China, and Greece, as well as colonial and turn-of-the-century America. "Images of Power," examines the nature of power and its forms--spiritual, political, and personal--as it is expressed in art around the world. "Mythology East and West," looks at selected myths from different cultures, and examines the ways mythological stories have been portrayed in works of art. Students will learn how these works reflect the cultural customs and values and consider the myths, heroes, and heroines of contemporary culture. These units were developed to prepare secondary level students for and build on corresponding gallery visits to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts but the materials may be adapted for independent use. Each unit focuses on about 10 works of art relevant to the theme. Background information and a black and white reproduction of each art object is provided. A series of questions encourage student description, interpretation, and creative response to works of art. Reproducible "Discovery Sheets" provide a range of activities that students can complete either on their own or in small groups. These activities require students to gather information, develop observation and comparison skills, and encourage personal reflection. Suggestions for further reading conclude the resource. (MM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 410 169

MFA

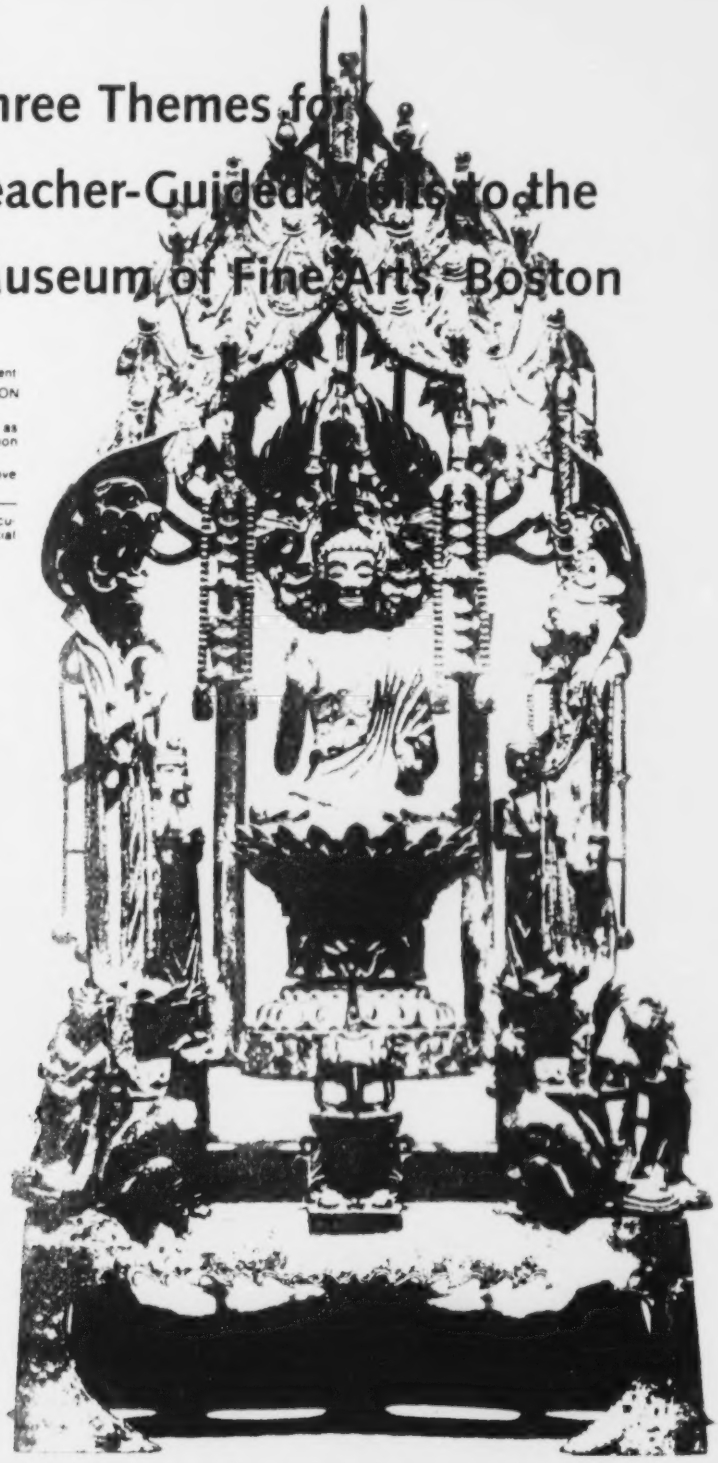
CONNECTIONS

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Margaret K. Burchenal
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Three Themes for Teacher-Guided Visits to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

SO 028 089



Daily Life Around the World

Images of Power

Mythology East and West

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Acknowledgments

These materials were developed and written by Allison Foote, Margaret Burchenal, and Rebecca Lange in collaboration with the following teachers from Boston Latin School:

William Bronski
Son-Mey Chiu
Ron Gwiazda
Barbara Hansel
Mary Alice Hantout
Diane Jaquith
Ruthann Kelley
Bradford A. Smith
Sandra Williams

We thank them for the time and energy they put into all stages of this project. The following teachers agreed to pilot materials and provided important feedback: Amy Aronson (Rockland Junior High School); Patricia Benecke (Swampscott Middle School); Jean Borque (Plymouth Community Intermediate School); Elizabeth Grace (O'Malley Middle School, Gloucester); Tom King (Scituate Junior-Senior High School); Zoe King (Waynflete School, Portland, Maine); Chris McDonnell (The Winsor School, Boston); Jeanne Miller (Ward Elementary School, Newton); Kevin Mullen (Campbell School, Dracut); Bruce Olean (Mystic Middle School, Connecticut); Ruth Riley (Immaculate Concepton School, Newburyport); Carol Scalisi (Batchelder School, North Reading); David Silhanek (Kimball Union Academy, Meriden, New Hampshire); Cynthia Towle (The Fitch School, Waltham).

Special thanks also are due to Publications Department staff Fredrica Harvey and Janet O'Donoghue and to Department of Education staff, especially Bill Burback, director, and Sarah G. Leahy, for many valuable suggestions for additions and revisions. Staff of the following curatorial departments provided advice and guidance: American Decorative Arts and Sculpture; Asiatic Art; Classical Art; Contemporary Art; Ancient Egyptian, Nubian, and Near Eastern Art; and Paintings. Last but not least, we are grateful to the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency, for providing the support that made this exciting collaboration possible.

Copyright ©1993
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Photographs by the Photographic Services Department, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Designed and typeset by Alison Taylor

For additional copies contact
Teacher Resources
Department of Education
Museum of Fine Arts
465 Huntington Avenue
Boston, MA 02115
(617) 267-9300 x300

To schedule a school group visit, call the Youth Group Visits Coordinator at (617) 267-9300 x310, Mondays through Thursdays, 8 am–4 pm

Contents

Introduction

Daily Life Around the World

Images of Power

Mythology East and West

Suggestions for Further Reading

Introduction

This material is a product of four years of collaboration between the MFA's Department of Education and a team of Boston Latin School (BLS) teachers participating in the "Connections" program. The Connections program began in 1989, when BLS received a three-year grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to create an innovative, interdisciplinary course in the arts. Working with MFA Department of Education staff and other consultants, a team of BLS teachers developed a new arts course at the eighth-grade level and, at the same time, refocused four other subject areas (ancient history, English, Latin, and modern foreign languages) to connect to the new arts course through a series of themes.

Visits to the MFA have been an integral part of the Connections program. BLS teachers have found Museum visits particularly effective in introducing students to the three themes presented here—Daily Life Around the World, Images of Power, and Mythology East and West. This material offers suggestions, based on the Connections program experience, for creating thematic units based on a Museum visit. While focusing on the Museum visit, each unit includes ideas for a sequence of activities that prepares students for and builds on their Museum experiences.

While these materials were designed for secondary school students, we hope that elementary teachers might adapt some of the projects and approaches for their own students.

ABOUT TEACHER-GUIDED MUSEUM VISITS

MFA Connections outlines three thematic approaches to exploring the MFA, developed by teachers in the BLS Connections program. These materials were developed to help teachers design and lead Museum visits that encourage students to make connections between works of art and the classroom curriculum. Bringing students on your own to the MFA can be exciting and fun when you take advantage of the Museum's unique learning environment to complement your ongoing classroom activities. You can use the MFA as a resource for teaching in a variety of ways, including:

- to introduce different civilizations, time periods, or themes visually
- to have students do "visual" research on group or individual projects
- to let students work independently to describe, compare, and analyze works of art produced in many different times and places
- to help students make personal connections with the people of different times and places through writing, sketching, or discussion prompted by works of art.

Introduction

HOW TO USE THESE MATERIALS

This teacher resource packet consists of three units, each suggesting a different route through the diverse collections of the MFA. This material also includes suggestions for classroom projects that introduce and build on the Museum experience. We have included more objects than you might comfortably see in one visit, so you can pick and choose among them to create a tour that fits your curriculum needs. In each unit you will find the following.

Information about Museum Objects

Each unit focuses on about ten works of art chosen for their relevance to the theme and their appeal to young people. Background information on each object is provided for teachers to read *before* the Museum visit. Teachers may choose to introduce an object first and then employ the discussion questions or to save the object information provided until after students have looked at and discussed objects on their own.

Maps

Where to find the objects highlighted in each unit.

Discussion Questions

A series of questions designed to help students describe, interpret, and respond creatively to works of art. The types of questions included here are designed to stimulate discussion; we hope you will use the ones that are most appropriate for your group and/or develop your own.

Discovery Sheets

A range of activities that students can complete either on their own or in small groups. The discovery sheets included here can be used to gather information and ideas, to develop observation and comparison skills, or to encourage personal reflection. The information, impressions, and ideas gathered by using these discovery sheets can be expanded upon in many different ways: to allow students to explore a gallery on their own in preparation for group discussion, to provide follow-up activities to group discussion, or to begin projects to be completed in the classroom. Duplicate and use the sheets provided here or develop your own, tailored to the needs and interests of your students. You may want to ask students to respond to one or more of the questions and to use additional sheets of paper for longer writing or sketching activities.

Pre-Visit and Post-Visit Projects

Suggestions for projects that may be used to introduce and follow a Museum visit. These projects can provide important links between classroom and Museum experiences; teachers should use them as time and interest allow. We hope that after you have tried our suggestions for routes through the MFA and student discussion and activities, you will use the information and approaches suggested here to develop additional classroom and Museum projects of your own.

Have fun! We hope students will leave wanting to come back again with their friends and family to further explore the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Introduction

PLANNING A MUSEUM VISIT

At the MFA, students can gain a deeper understanding of what life was like in different times and places and, through the personal exploration and interpretation of original works of art, connect the world of the past with the world of today. The world-famous collections of the MFA include masterpieces from around the globe—from Europe, Africa, and Asia to the Americas. These works span all time, from the early civilizations of ancient Egypt, Nubia, China, Greece, and Rome to the founding of this nation and to the art of today. As primary sources about the past, works of art carry important information—information that you and your students can discover for yourselves through careful observation.

Here are some suggestions for planning your visit to the MFA.

Logistics

Once you have scheduled your visit with the Youth Group Visits Coordinator, visit the Museum yourself so you can become familiar with the route your group will take from the School Group Entrance to the galleries you plan to visit and back. Consider how much time you want to spend in each gallery and how much time it takes to get from one part of the Museum to another.

Note: The works of art discussed here are usually on view, but occasionally they may be moved or taken off exhibition (for conservation, for a special exhibition, or for some other reason). Please visit the galleries to check the location of objects you want to work with **before** you bring your students.

Museum Etiquette

To facilitate small group activities, divide your class into groups of no more than ten, each with a chaperone. Prepare your chaperones for the visit so they understand what their role is and how they can help you achieve your goals.

Tell students that they'll need to use all their senses at the Museum EXCEPT their sense of touch. Please remind them not to touch works of art or the display cases. The oils on our hands (think of the fingerprints hands leave on glass doors or windows) damage works of art, even those made out of stone or bronze. And don't forget that food, drink, and chewing gum are not allowed in Museum galleries.

Structure

Structure your visit so that students spend some time together as a group and some time working on their own on a project using the discovery sheets provided here (or those you design yourself).

Make sure you plan enough time for your visit—usually between one and two hours is the right amount. The MFA is too big to see everything in one visit, which is why we suggest focusing on no more than ten objects on any one visit.

Introduction

Exploring the Galleries

Begin by orienting your students to the galleries they will be working in and introducing the theme they will explore. The discussion questions that accompany each object offer an approach to helping students look thoughtfully at works of art by asking them to:

- describe what they see in careful detail
- analyze what they see (what does this object tell us about the time and place it came from? what choices did the artist make?)
- interpret (what overall effect is created?)
- develop personal connections and responses to works of art.

As time permits, choose one or two points in your visit when students can explore the galleries on their own (or in teams of two or three). Use the discovery sheets provided here or develop projects of your own to be completed during this time.

Reading Labels

Remind students that they can often learn more about an object that interests them by reading the label. Labels usually provide basic information about the artist, subject matter, date, material, etc. and also give the object's accession number. The accession number tells you when that object was acquired by the MFA. For example, an object whose accession number is 21.886 was the 886th object to be acquired in 1921.

Wrapping Up

Set a time and a place for your students and chaperones to regroup. Ask students to share some of their discoveries. What was most surprising to them? What questions do they want to pursue further?

Daily Life Around the World

OVERVIEW

This unit explores the rituals of daily life in ancient Egypt, China, and Greece as well as colonial and turn-of-the-century America. The works of art created by these cultures offer vivid portraits of the people of long ago, telling of their private and public lives and revealing a core of shared attitudes, beliefs, and customs. Through studying and comparing a selection of artworks that span more than four thousand years of history, students will come to understand what shapes and defines a culture and to develop their own ideas about what has changed and what has remained constant in the human experience. The following paragraphs describe the objects from the Museum collection that will be discussed in this unit.

Egypt

The furniture of Queen Hetep-heres and the tomb objects of Djehuty-nakht are evidence of the privileges of the royal and politically powerful, the importance of ceremony, and the spiritual life of those living in ancient Egyptian society.

China

The objects, or "spirit goods," excavated from the underground tombs of ancient China represent that culture's most prized possessions and the desire of those people for spiritual guidance and protection. The objects that were buried along with the deceased (in this case, a man thought to be a wealthy feudal lord) provided all the pleasures of an ideal life after death. The paintings on the Han tomb lintel and pediment espouse the virtues of goodness, honor, and remembrance.

Greece

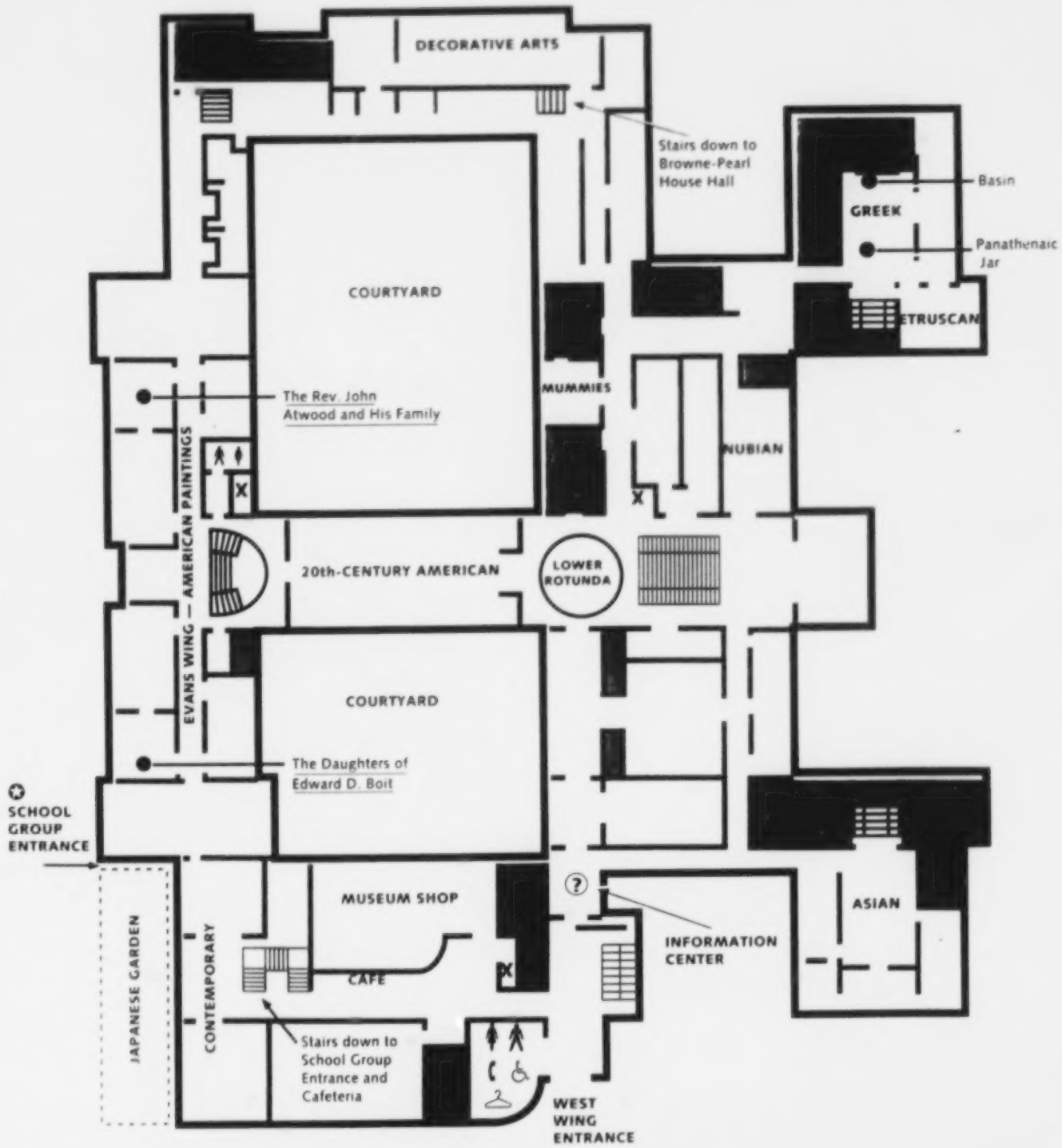
Paintings on Greek vases record the daily rituals, celebrations, pleasures, and pastimes of this ancient Mediterranean culture. The Panathenaic vase reveals the spirit of competition and the rigors of physical training as practiced by Greek athletes and admired by the whole society.

America

American period rooms dating from 1700 to the 1800s provide the experience of walking back through time into the world of our early ancestors. Seeing the actual spaces, furnishings, and decorations of these people gives us a sense of their changing needs, tastes, and life-styles.

The group portraits by Henry Darby and John Singer Sargent offer a glimpse into the lives of two wealthy nineteenth-century American families. The personalities of these individuals are revealed through their poses, expressions, and gestures.

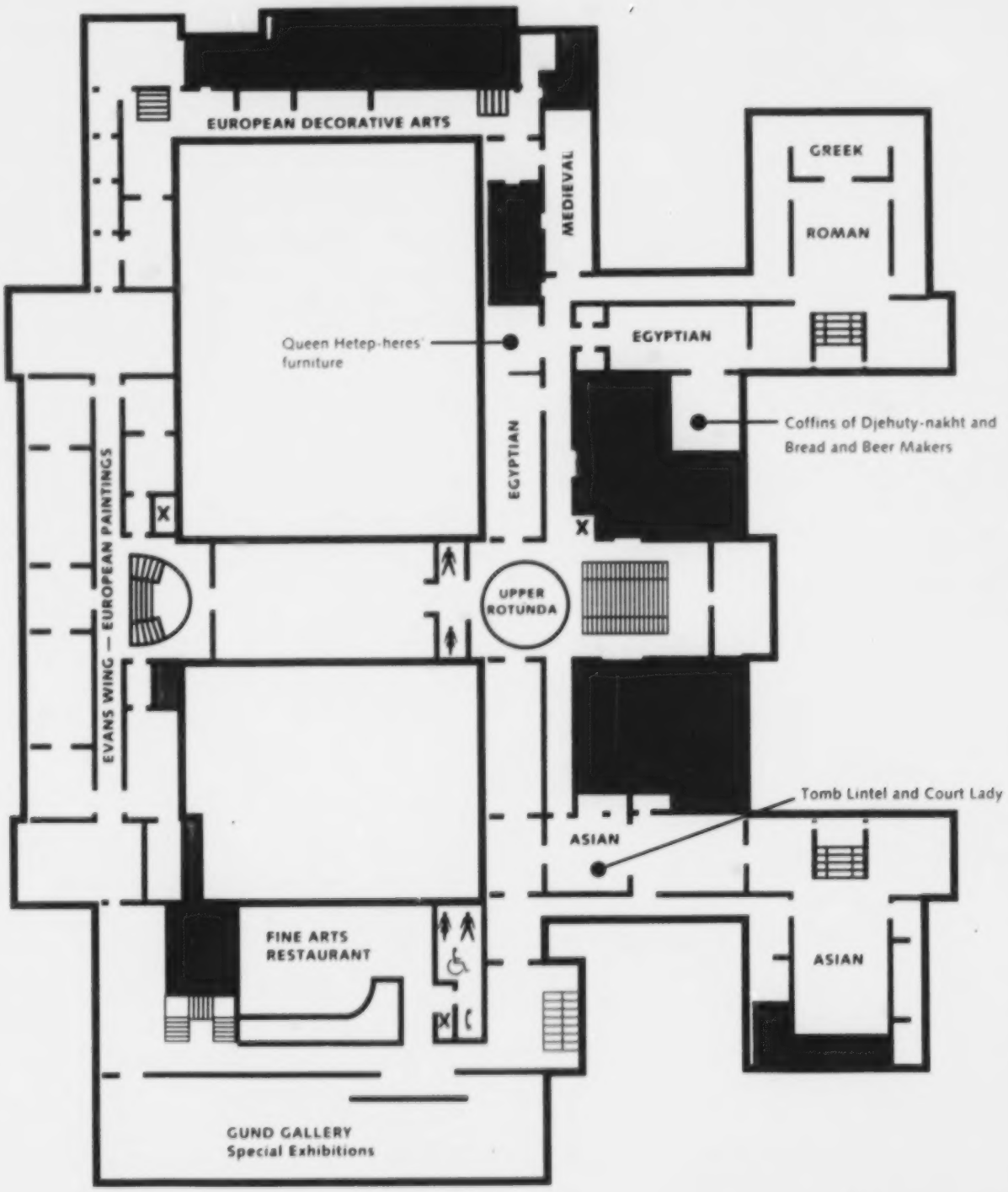
MFA CONNECTIONS: Daily Life Around the World



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

1 FIRST FLOOR

Note: The works of art discussed here are usually on view, but occasionally they may be moved or taken off exhibition (for conservation, for a special exhibition,or for some other reason). Please visit the galleries to check the location of objects you want to work with **before** you bring your students.



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

2 SECOND FLOOR

EGYPT

Discussion Questions

Do you find anything unusual or strange about this ancient Egyptian bed? Why do you think it was designed that way?

How do you think it would feel to sit or sleep on this furniture?

What might the tall golden frame have been used for? What do you think the curtains were used for?

What do you imagine the markings on the posts to be?

Look at the sedan chair behind you; what do you think this might have been used for? How would you describe this particular model?

Do you think it would have been comfortable traveling in this manner? Why or why not?

Do you think this is how most people traveled back then?

Think of some other modes of transportation people have used or invented down through the ages. Are they still in use today?

Queen Hetep-heres' Furniture
Dynasty 4, 2630–2583 B.C.

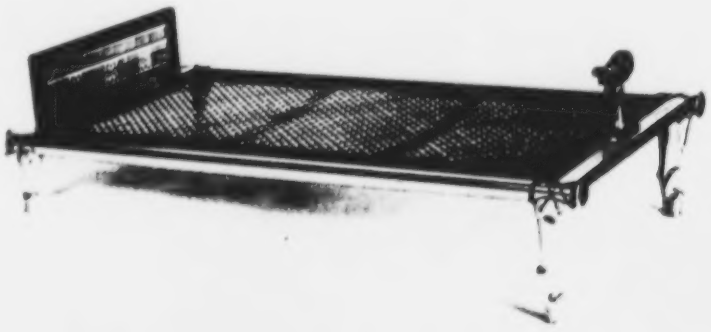
These modern reproductions are important records of some of the earliest and most elaborate furniture ever discovered from the ancient world. The Museum Expedition at Giza found the original furniture pieces in 1925. They belonged to Queen Hetep-heres, the mother of King Khufu (2606–2583 B.C.), the builder of the Great Pyramid. The actual ancient bed, canopy, chair, and curtain box are now in the Cairo Museum.

Whenever Queen Hetep-heres traveled through the desert, these items were carried along in her private caravan and served as her substitute bedroom. Since no motels existed along the Egyptian roadway at the time, her possessions provided the queen with the comforts of home.

Note: This gallery has poor acoustics, which makes conversation within a large group difficult.

Reproduction bed of Queen Hetep-heres 29.1858

Like most Egyptian beds, this one is made of a wooden framework with animal legs. The queen would have had layers of linen laid down over the frame for comfort and warmth. (Common people would have slept either on the floor or on woven rush—a mattress-like support made of soft marsh grasses.) Beds were designed to slant down toward the footboard, included so that the sleeper would not slip out. Instead of pillows, Egyptians used headrests that consisted of a curved neckpiece set on top of a pillar on an oblong base. Usually made from wood or stone, these headrests were sometimes wrapped in several layers of cloth to make them more comfortable.



OTHER OBJECTS IN THIS GALLERY

Reproduction bed canopy of Queen Hetep-heres 38.873

This structure served as a portable tent frame for the queen. Sheer linen curtains hung from small hooks at the top of this canopy to provide shade from the hot sun as well as protection against insects. On the inside of the doorjambs are the names and titles of the queen's husband.

Reproduction chair 38.957

Most Egyptians used stools; chairs were far rarer items and generally were owned by people of higher rank. Most chairs were designed with animal-shaped legs and a slanted backrest. This low, wide chair has openwork sides in the form of lotus plants.

Reproduction curtain box 39.746

This box, painted and carved in intricate detail, is inlaid with faience with gold and silver foil. Linens for the canopy bed were stored safely inside.

Modern reproduction of a carrying chair 38.874

Among the remains of furniture found in the queen's tomb was an ornate carrying (or sedan) chair, originally constructed of cyprus and ebony and decorated with gold. When the original wood decayed, the applied gold hieroglyphs fell onto the tomb floor in order, preserving the name and titles of the tomb's owner.

Daily Life Around the World

EGYPT

Discussion Questions

Look at the images of household items painted on this coffin. Do any of these look familiar? Why do you think the artist painted these here?

From looking at these objects, what would you say was most important to ancient Egyptians' lives?

What do these objects reveal about how they spent their lives and viewed death?

How would you say our view of life and death is similar/different from the ancient Egyptians'?

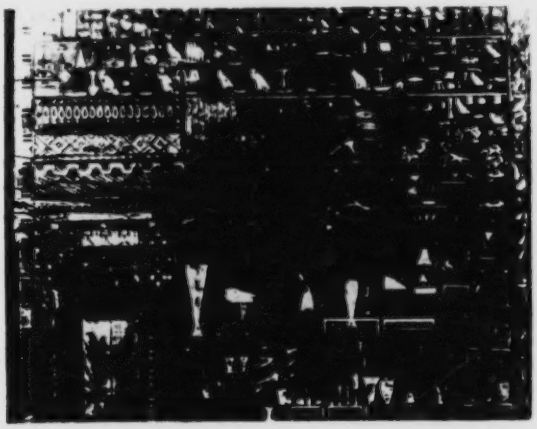
What are some of our beliefs regarding death and the afterlife?

What are some of our practices for preparing for death?

Coffins of Djehuty-nakht
Late Dynasty II, 2061–1991 B.C.

The tomb of the nomarch, or provincial ruler, Djehuty-nakht was excavated by the Harvard University Museum of Fine Arts Expedition in March 1915. This spectacular tomb had been robbed and vandalized in ancient times, but hundreds of objects remained to give us a sense of the number and variety of objects included in a Middle Kingdom (2061–1784 B.C.) tomb. The largest objects found in the tomb were these wooden coffins. Because wood was extremely rare in Egypt, it was very valuable and used only for special purposes. The wood used for this coffin was cedar, probably imported from Lebanon.

As you can see in this gallery, Djehuty-nakht was buried in two nested coffins; the outer coffin is displayed in its separate pieces. The side panel (in the first case on left) of the outermost coffin has an elaborate representation of the false door (at left in illustration) through which Djehuty-nakht's spirit could return to the world. Look for Djehuty-nakht himself, seated in front of an offering table.



Interior face of the outer coffin of Djehuty-nakht 20.1823

This side of the coffin has horizontal lines of hieroglyphs at the top giving the name and titles of Djehuty-nakht. Below this is a band that describes (from right to left) in pictures, a list of things for the deceased to use in the afterlife: a bed, headrests, razors, walking sticks, a fan, a black-handled mirror in a carrying case with strap, a kilt, scribal palettes, vases, a cowhide shield and quiver, weapons, and carpentry tools.

Outer coffin base and inner coffin of Djehuty-nakht 20.1827

In the center of this room is the inner coffin that held Djehuty-nakht's mummy. The inside is carved with funerary texts, called the "Book of the Two Ways," which served as a guide for the spirit in the underworld. One of the images painted on the inside of the coffin is a map of the underworld, included to help Djehuty-nakht's spirit find its way more easily.

Daily Life Around the World

EGYPT

Discussion Questions

Look at the various models shown here. Describe the different activities you see. Why do you suppose they were made?

What tools and materials do you think the artists used to make these models? (In your exploration of the Museum collection, you can find some of these tools and materials in the glass cases.)

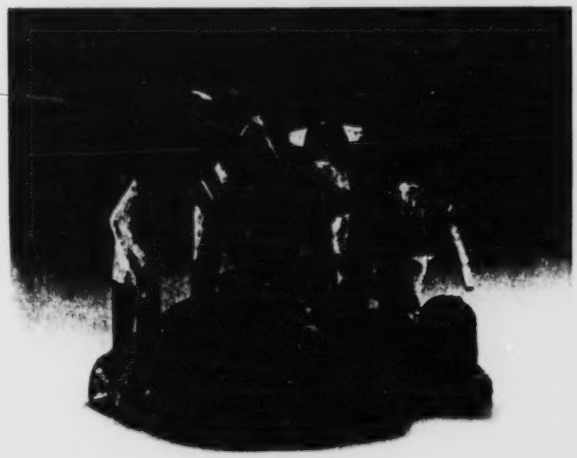
What do these objects reveal about the religious beliefs and the life-styles of their owners?

Imagine if you were to have some things like this carved for you; what services would you wish could be provided to you for all eternity?

How are the burial customs in our country today similar to or different from those of the ancient Egyptians?

Bread and Beer Makers
Late Dynasty II, 2061–1991 B.C. 21.886

Wooden models such as this one, intended to magically provide necessities for the deceased in the afterlife, were buried inside the tombs along with other treasured items. The Egyptians believed that these models, carved and painted representations of people and objects, would come alive to serve as valued servants and possessions for the deceased so that his/her afterlife would be happy and comfortable. The various models here represent: a kitchen boat, a funeral yacht, farmers, bread and beer makers (illustrated here), bird hunters, spinners and weavers, brick makers, and carpenters.



OTHER OBJECTS IN THIS GALLERY

Paddle dolls 74.4287 and no number

Wooden dolls made of narrow pieces of wood were common children's toys in the Middle Kingdom. Some of these dolls have hair made of pellets of mud on strings. Their faces, clothing, jewelry, and other details were added in colorful paints. Other toys popular at this time were balls (made from vegetable fiber), tops (made from faience or glazed composition, like glass), and carved wooden animals with moving parts.

Fragments of two magic wands 12.1519 and no number

Magic wands were designed to ward off poisonous creatures such as snakes and scorpions during the night. The wands were laid near or under the bed, and their owners may have drawn magic circles around the bed before going to sleep. The wands are decorated with representations of mythical beasts and protective deities. The power of these wands, which were made from either elephant or hippopotamus ivory, was due in part to the strength of the animals from which they came.

EGYPT

DISCOVERY SHEET

Looking at the painted images on the coffin of Djehuty-nakht, choose one to draw. Write something to accompany your picture: e.g., a poem, story, or description.

Think about the most important things in your life. Imagine that you could take only a few precious objects with you for your life after death. What would they be and why? Describe some favorite activities that you would wish to continue practicing in your afterlife.

16

Daily Life Around the World

EGYPT

In the cases along the walls, you will find an assortment of beautiful and mysterious objects. Choose one that fills you with wonder and make a drawing of it and create a story about it.

If you had a box like Queen Hetep-heres' curtain box, what might you use it for? Design a box that would contain valuable items that you wouldn't want to leave home without. Describe your design in words or in pictures.

Daily Life Around the World

CHINA

Discussion Questions

What do you imagine this object might be? What do you think it is made from?

Look carefully at the figures on this object. Even though the painting is quite faded, can you imagine what kind of people these figures would be?

What do you imagine the ram's head might represent?

Think about decorations that you see above doors in our culture. What kinds of things do we hang above or on our doors? What do they signify?

What do you see the animals and figures doing in these illustrations?

How would you describe the men and women in these scenes?

Who do you think these people might be?

Does this object look the same from both sides?

Why do you think this decoration was created for a tomb doorway?

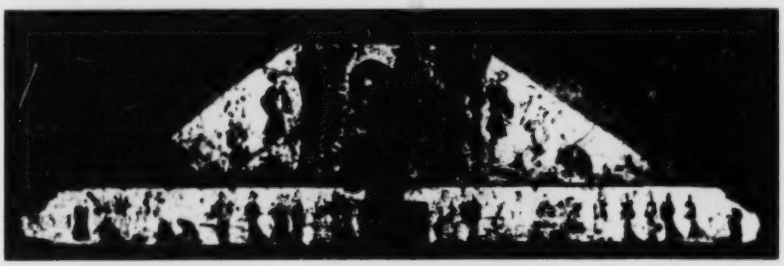
Why do you think the ancient Chinese might have created these tombs?

Do we have anything like this in our culture?

What are some of the ways we honor our dead?

Lintel and Pediment of a Tomb
First century B.C. 25.190 and 25.10–13

This lintel (the horizontal beam) and pediment (the triangular piece above the lintel) supported the roof and separated two rooms of a multichambered, underground tomb. It was made from earthenware, a coarse clay baked inside a kiln fire to harden. Buried inside the tomb along with the deceased were many of the objects similar to the ones on display in this gallery. (Note: objects here are from both the Han and Tang dynasties.) At the top of the pediment is a sculpted ram's head, which signifies good fortune. The Chinese character for "ram" sounds similar to the words for "prosperity" and "fertility." The lintel and pediment are painted (now very faded) with figures and animals, including a tiger and bear (on either end of the triangular pediment) who appear to be in combat in what may be an imperial hunting reserve. On one side of the lintel are tales of loyalty to an emperor or feudal warlord; on the other side are tales of virtuous women. All of the figures are tall and thin with long, elegant faces and wear the traditional clothing of the early Chinese court. The characters from these tales can be identified through their actions, which made them worthy examples for future generations. Popular in China during the first century B.C., these paintings reflect a new style of tomb decoration that was intended to promote the Confucian virtues of loyalty, integrity, and proper behavior as well as to demonstrate the piety of the deceased.



Daily Life Around the World

CHINA

Discussion Questions

How would you describe this figure?

What can you tell about her by looking at her?

Do you have any idea of her age, profession, social class?

How would you describe her expression?

What is she wearing on her head?

What is she holding in her hands?

Why do you think her shoes were designed this way?

How do you imagine it would feel to walk in them?

Why do you think this might have been put in a tomb?

Consider the objects buried with the ancient Egyptian ruler Djehuty-nahkt. How do they compare with these Chinese tomb objects?

Seated Court Lady with Phoenix Headdress
Tang dynasty, early eighth century 50.1807

Crowned with an elegant headdress and clothed in colorful silks, this woman sits with fan in hand offering an attentive smile. As a court lady accompanying the sovereign, she would have read poetry, played music, and engaged the king in conversation. Her highly fashionable shoes, upturned and pointed at the toe, were of a type worn only by wealthy and privileged women who had little need of the practical footwear worn by working women.

This earthenware sculpture is modeled to reflect the ideal of feminine beauty and the height of fashion of the day and gives us the sense of the luxury of court life in the Tang dynasty (early eighth century). Figures like this were placed in tombs to provide the deceased with courtiers, servants, guards, and domestic animals for the afterlife.

OTHER OBJECTS IN THIS GALLERY

Earth Demon with human face and animal body 52.1686

Model of a three-story silo 50.1844

Daily Life Around the World

CHINA

Make a list of all of the objects you find that relate to the following: music, recreation, fashion, household, religion, transportation, occupations. Can you find other categories? Which of these objects is your favorite and why?

Make a list of objects in this gallery that have modern-day equivalents. Describe how they have similar shapes, functions, or significance to us today.

Daily Life Around the World

CHINA

Is there an object that you want to know more about? What doesn't the label tell you that you would like to know? If you could ask two questions of a Museum curator, what would they be?

Draw or describe your favorite object in this gallery. Why do you like it so much? If it were yours, what would you do with it?

21

GREECE

Discussion Questions

Looking at the size, shape, and decoration of this vase, can you imagine what it might have been used for?

What images do you see on this vase? Do they tell a story?

What sports did the Greeks compete in? (You will find many pictures of these on the vases in this gallery.)

What are some of the competitive sports we have today?

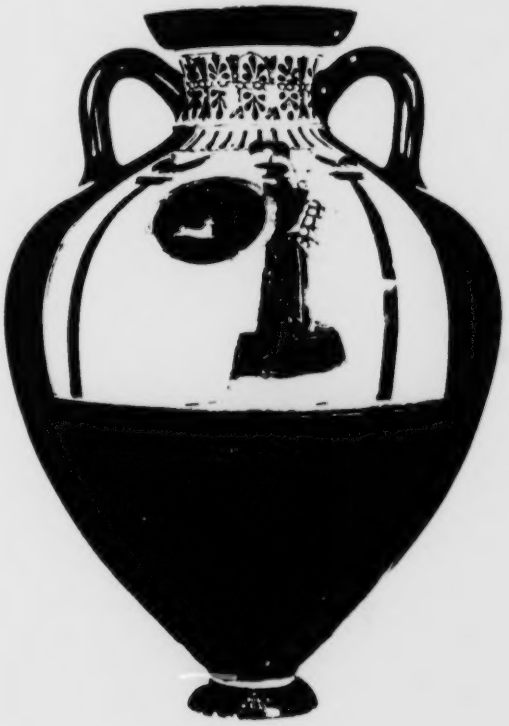
What kind of awards do we give winners in our sporting events?

Do you think our sports are different or similar to those of the Greeks? How?

Two-Handled Jar (Amphora of Panathenaic Shape)
About 530–520 B.C. 01.8127

This vase is the size and shape of the amphoras full of olive oil given as prizes at the Panathenaic Games at Athens (the forerunner of the Olympic Games). Olive oil was an extremely precious commodity in the ancient Mediterranean world. It was a valuable export and trade item because it was used for cooking and curing foods, for lamp fuel, and for cosmetic purposes (women used it to soften their skin, and male athletes used it to clean and moisturize their bodies after exercise).

The striding Athena (founder and protector of the city of Athens) decorates one side, while the other side depicts the boxing competition for which this prize would have been awarded.



OTHER OBJECTS IN THIS GALLERY

Mirror and stand: Aphrodite and Erotes 98.667

Oil flask (Lekythos) 13.189

In the case that contains the mirror and stand is a collection of jewelry made from bronze, gold, amber, and glass.

Daily Life Around the World

GREECE

Discussion Questions

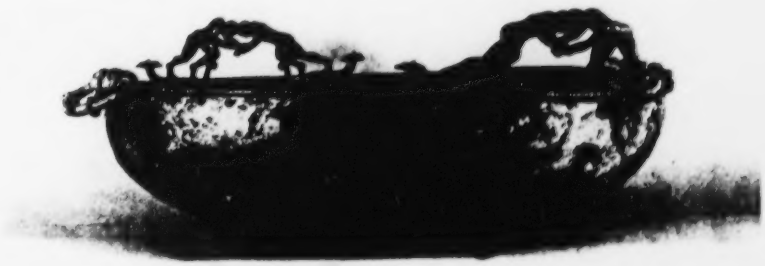
What can you tell about this object just by looking at it?

The Greeks ate while reclining on couches. How do you think this would change one's experience of dining?

What sorts of food and drink do you think they might have had?

How do you think the guests might have been entertained at a party back then?

How would you compare the customs and activities at our dinner parties today with those of the ancient Greeks?



Bronze Basin
Early fifth century B.C. 03.999

Paintings on Greek vases show that a basin like this one was used primarily as a footbath. Such basins are often depicted on the floor next to a couch, placed there so that banqueters could wash the dust from their feet before reclining to eat. At a dinner party (called a *symposium*) in ancient Greece, guests might have read poetry or played games such as draughts, which is similar to checkers, or would have been entertained by musicians playing flute-like instruments. The handles, floral supports, and palmette attachments are solid-cast, while the basin itself is hammered from a single sheet of bronze, repaired with patches in modern times. (On the handles are sculpted forms of wrestling figures, a clue that this basin may also have been used for washing after athletic exercise.)

OTHER OBJECTS IN THIS GALLERY

In this gallery, you can find a strigil and discus. In the gallery beyond is a collection of bronze fibulas (or safety pins), soldiers' helmets, and a shield.

Daily Life Around the World

GREECE

DISCOVERY SHEET

Looking at the vases in this gallery, note the various daily life activities of ordinary men and women. Record the different images you see. What does this tell you about the roles of men and women in ancient Greek society?

Imagine you could step back in time and spend a day in ancient Greece. What would you want to see and do?

Daily Life Around the World

GREECE

Write a conversation between any two characters you find interesting in this gallery. (They could be from any painted or sculpted form you find here.)

Design an award to be given to the winner in some sporting event. What material will it be made from? What shape will it be? Will you want to draw or inscribe anything on it? Sketch or describe your design here.

AMERICA

Discussion Questions

What is your first impression of this room?

Where do you think we are in time and place?

What things do you notice in this room?

Why do you think the bed, windows, ceiling, and fireplace are designed the way they are?

What kinds of things would you do in this room?

Imagine what a typical day was like back then.

What kind of activities and chores kept these early settlers busy? What do you think they did for recreation?

Think about what it was like to live back in colonial America. What do you think would have been the hardest part? What would have been the most fun?

Compare this style of living with ours today. What is similar and what is different?

Brown-Pearl House Hall
About 1704

This room is an example of how a well-to-do family would have lived during the 1700s in colonial America. Because of the harsh New England winters, the houses of this period were designed for heat efficiency. Thus, the ceilings were low and windows were small in order to retain heat. Large walk-in fireplaces such as the one here were made from fieldstones found on site and were the sole generators of heat; therefore, they were generally placed in the center of the room. The curtains on the canopy bed would have been drawn at night for warmth as well as for privacy. High-backed benches such as the one here were often used as room partitions, and one could face the fire without too much heat escaping overhead. The imported carpet, seen draped over the table for decoration, is evidence that this family was well off; the average colonial settler was too poor to afford such luxuries.

Note: This row of period rooms does not have adequate space for a large group of students. The first room of the Brown-Pearl House does have a bench that seats about ten to twelve comfortably. Since these rooms are so small, teachers may want students to split up into groups.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Daily Life Around the World

AMERICA

Discussion Questions

What can you tell about this family by looking at them?

What kind of glimpse does it give you into the life-style of this family?

What was the style of fashion back then—in dress, hairstyles, home furnishings?

How would you describe the way the artist has painted this portrait?

How would you describe their individual expressions?

Would you like to be part of this family? Why or why not?

Would you have liked living back in this time? What do you think it might have been like?

In what ways would this picture be different if it were set in modern times?

Henry Darby (1829–1897)
The Rev. John Atwood and His Family, 1845 62.269

This portrait of the Atwood family represents a young painter's first grand effort. The seventeen-year-old Massachusetts artist Henry Darby was virtually self-taught. He spent the summer of 1845 in the home of a Baptist minister's family in New Hampshire, creating a detailed portrait that captured many aspects of their world. The large family is depicted at their daily Bible study. In his diary, Darby described the painting this way: "The father was represented sitting in the midst of his admiring wife and children expounding his Bible..." On the wall hangs an Old Testament print and a picture memorializing a deceased son. Darby has carefully rendered the parlor furnishings—the oil lamp, the patterned wallpaper, and the ornate carpet—presenting a home of some means. His delight in color, pattern, and detail give the painting a clarity and directness. This early work is Darby's only surviving large family portrait.

AMERICA

Discussion Questions

When do you think this picture was painted? What clues do you have?

Describe the things you see in this painting.

What does this painting reveal about these girls and their lifestyles? What can you tell from looking at their expressions and poses?

Which girl do you find the most interesting? Why?

How would you compare this family with the Atwood family? What are the differences in the style and composition of the two paintings?

Are portraits like this one still created today?

How are our portraits today similar to or different from this one?

John Singer Sargent (1856–1925)
The Daughters of Edward D. Boit, 1882 19.124

The four daughters of the wealthy Bostonian and artist Edward Darley Boit are seen in their Paris apartment; the cosmopolitan family divided its time between Europe and America. When this painting was made, Julia, the youngest, was four; Mary Louise, at the left, was eight; and Florence and Jane, who stand together in the back, were fourteen and twelve. The young artist John Singer Sargent, raised in Europe and trained in Paris, was a friend of the family and part of the same international social circle.

Many critics of the day found this painting extremely unconventional due to its composition, the asymmetrical figures, and the dominance of the shadowy "void" of the background. Sargent has captured a universal sense of the intelligence, innocence, and experience of children, while also portraying each young girl's individual character. In the expression and demeanor of each child, the viewer may catch a glimpse of a different stage of life. None of the girls in this portrait married, and in 1919, they gave the picture to the Museum in memory of their father.

With its psychological subtlety and dazzling brushwork, this striking portrait was Sargent's artistic debut. Soon afterward, he became the most sought-after portrait artist of his time.

OTHER OBJECTS IN THIS GALLERY

Mary Stevenson Cassatt (1844–1926), Five O'Clock Tea, about 1880 42.178

Teapot, Creampot, Covered Sugar Bowl, Waste Bowl, and Two Teapots 1982.359–364
Compare the silver tea service seen in this painting with the real objects owned by the Cassatt family on view here.

Mary Stevenson Cassatt, At the Opera, 1879 10.35

AMERICA

Look around at the paintings in this gallery. Describe the different activities and scenes that you see. What do these pictures reveal about life in America at this time in our history?

Take on the role of curator and write a label for one of the paintings in this gallery. What do you think would be important for people to know about this work?

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Daily Life Around the World

AMERICA

If you could interview a person from one of the portraits in this gallery, who would it be and why? What would you like to ask that person? Imagine what response you might receive to your questions. Draw a picture of this person to accompany your interview.

Daily Life Around the World

SUGGESTIONS FOR PRE-VISIT AND POST-VISIT PROJECTS

General

The class could discuss the function and methods of archaeologists. Teachers might ask students to bring in an object and have the class discuss what its form, material, and function reveal about the culture.

Teachers might organize a slide presentation and discussion as a preview of some of the objects to be studied from the MFA collection. (Slides could be borrowed from the MFA library.)

Students could propose their own research project that might involve reading a historical or biographical novel, visiting a historical site, or watching a film based on a historical account of a person or event and then organize a class presentation based on their discoveries.

Students, individually or in small groups, could research and write about the history and evolution of a chosen sport, game, or activity from ancient Egypt, China, or Greek culture. This report could become part of a larger illustrated textbook compiled and created by the class.

Students, individually or collaboratively, could study the role of music in an ancient world culture. (They might view the objects in the MFA's gallery of musical instruments located on the first floor.) Following their research, students could create their own musical instrument, based on their own invention or on an existing form. These could be two-dimensional designs or actual three-dimensional forms (made from a variety of simple materials such as tin cans, wood, cardboard, string, wire, rubber bands, etc.). Students could play these instruments for the class and describe the occasion or ceremony during which this instrument would be used.

From their observations and notes made during their visit to the MFA galleries, students could work on a group project creating a museum exhibition of modern life that would represent either real or invented customs and rituals, hobbies, and pastimes of American culture today. This exhibit could be a combination of actual or created objects, writings, and artwork that would be accompanied by labels with dates, settings, and descriptive stories.

Daily Life Around the World

SUGGESTIONS FOR PRE-VISIT AND POST-VISIT PROJECTS

Egypt

After exploring Queen Hetep-heres' furniture, students consider their ideal traveling "bedroom under the stars." Their designs could be in the form of written descriptions and/or painted, drawn, or collaged pictures.

After investigating the games and toys created by the ancient Egyptians (found in the coffin room of Djehuty-nakht and adjacent galleries), students could invent a game of their own, in words or in pictures, explaining how it would be used or played.

The various ritual objects in the MFA's collection might inspire students to invent their own object that would serve some function in a real or imagined ritual ceremony, either public or private. Teachers might preface this project by asking students to research the rites and rituals of various ancient cultures.

Students create their own secret language based on their study of the images and hieroglyphs from the coffins of Djehuty-nakht. This language might be composed of invented signs, symbols, or letters, and an example could be presented in the form of a letter, postcard, personal diary, etc.

A map of the underworld as the Egyptians envisioned it appears on the inner coffin of Djehuty-nakht. After viewing this map, students could consider creating their own map of the underworld, a planet, uncharted island, or another realm of some kind.

China

After viewing the Han tomb lintel and other objects in that gallery, students design a special room that would be filled with objects, pictures, and writings that would document their life and represent the things they would most like to be remembered by. They could begin by writing about the most important public and private moments, events, and accomplishments of their lives.

After viewing the sculpture of an Earth Demon in the Han tomb gallery, students design their own guardian figure. They will need to consider its function (that is, what it would protect them from); its form and material; and where it will be placed. The figures could be created on paper, in clay, in papier-mâché, or in written form. This project could be prefaced by researching the history of guardian figures throughout the world.

Students select a favorite object from the MFA's collection to research that relates to some important aspect of Chinese culture: religion, literature, music, transportation, agriculture, etc. Their research findings could culminate in a class presentation in the form of speaking, writing, drawing, or performance.

Daily Life Around the World

SUGGESTIONS FOR PRE-VISIT AND POST-VISIT PROJECTS

Greece

Students design and plan a school field day based on the ancient Greek tradition of sports and games. Prizes could be created for the winners of the different competitions. This athletic event might be accompanied by various kinds of theatrical, artistic, and musical group presentations.

After studying the various shapes and functions of the Greek vases, students design their own vessel that holds some special substance or object. This could be a purely invented form or drawn from one of the ancient Greek designs. Students will need to consider how the form, material, and decoration of the vessel relate to its function.

America

Students could write a story (or make an improvisational tape recording on site) based on their observations and thoughts about the Browne-Pearl House period room and the people who might have lived there. These writings and/or recordings could consist of imaginary conversations, descriptive reports, etc. and could culminate in a book-making project, dramatic performance, or group presentation.

Based on notes and observations of the American period rooms and ancient Egyptian furniture, students could create pictures of rooms from the past, present, and future. These could be in the form of drawings, paintings, collages, models, or words. These designs, a combination of real and imaginary interiors, should reflect the many changes in homes through the ages. This project could be followed by a comparative study of dwellings from other cultures through history.

After examining the various portraits of families and individuals in the MFA collection, students create their own self-portraits in a series of drawings, paintings, or photographs. These self-portraits could also take the form of a poem, short story, or essay.

Gathering old photographs, letters, diaries, and stories from parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents, students could create a family portrait-story in words and pictures. Uncovering facts about the lives of these people, students will discover their own origins, how they were shaped and defined by their families, and how life-styles have changed through the generations. In creating profiles of relatives and family friends, students could describe the different aspects of an individual's life—place of birth, education, hobbies, professions, accomplishments, personal relationships, etc. This book could take written form or be a video, collage, exhibit, or performance that focuses on the rich diversity of personal lives and cultural origins.

Images of Power

OVERVIEW

This unit explores the nature of power and its many forms—spiritual, natural, political, and personal—as it is expressed in art around the world. Through analyzing and comparing Museum artworks that span more than thirty-five centuries of history, students will develop their own ideas about what these works reveal about cultural customs and values. Considering the significance of the material, scale, placement, and function of each artwork, students will reflect on how these elements contribute to the overall expressive power of the work. This unit is designed to allow for many personal interpretations of the works by encouraging teachers and students to pose questions and explore their own perceptions of the meaning of power.

The objects selected for discussion include sculpture from ancient China, Nubia, and Crete and paintings and sculpture from Flanders, France, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century America. These include images that protect, images that honor, images that celebrate culture, and images that pose moral questions and suggest the power of individual thought and action. Some of these pieces are ambiguous and force the viewer to confront contradictions. A description of some of the works to be explored in the Museum collection and the kind of power they illustrate follows.

China

The ancient Chinese Amitabha altarpiece suggests the power of transformation. It is concerned with the power of ritual and faith and of gaining control over what will happen in the next life. The lotus flower on which the Buddha sits represents the power of life, beauty, and growth that overcomes difficult obstacles.

Nubia

The monumental sculpture of King Aspelta is a portrait created by ancient Nubians of their great ruler. This monolithic work reveals a figure of godlike proportion and power.

Greece

The Snake Goddess is a powerful woman. Her figure and pose vividly express great power, although her actual size is quite small. Students will compare this sculpture with King Aspelta and consider the differences in the choice of material and size and how these contribute to the impressions of these works as images of power.

Europe

Peter Paul Rubens' painting *The Head of Cyrus Brought to Queen Tomyris* is about political power wielded for selfish aims. In this striking and dramatic work, Rubens portrays the actions of the rich and powerful queen gaining personal revenge through an act of murder. Because of the large scale of this work and the position of the figures, the viewer almost feels like a participant in the event.

Images of Power

OVERVIEW

Europe

Jean François Millet, in his painting *The Sower*, has created an archetypal image of a peasant, a working-class hero performing an act of faith. The ritual sowing of the grain portrays both the randomness of events and the abundance of life. This large-scale portrait shows one human being's indomitable strength and hopefulness in the face of uncertainty.

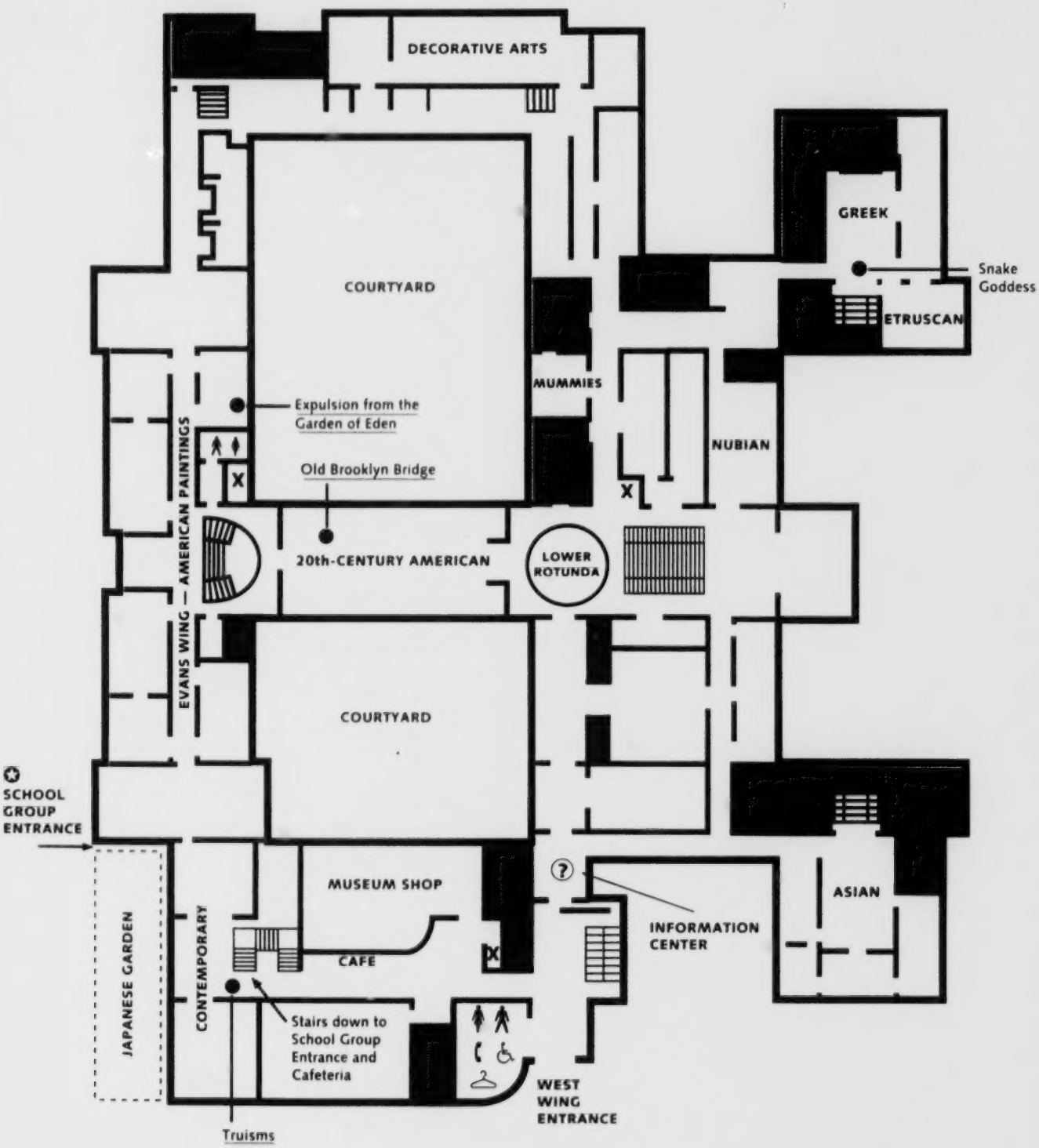
America

Thomas Cole's painting *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* shows the moral power of choosing our actions. Drawing a parallel between the destruction of the American landscape and original sin, Cole portrays the fragile balance that exists between civilization and nature.

Old Brooklyn Bridge, by Joseph Stella, is both a personal vision and a public image of change. It is a surprising work, full of light, movement, and sound and open to many interpretations. It is a metaphorical image symbolizing the technological power that exists in the modern world.

Jenny Holzer works with the power of electronic media and uses the element of surprise to get her messages across to the public. Her sometimes humorous, shocking, and ambiguous statements address issues of morality and questioning and are designed to evoke responses from the viewer.

MFA CONNECTIONS: Images of Power

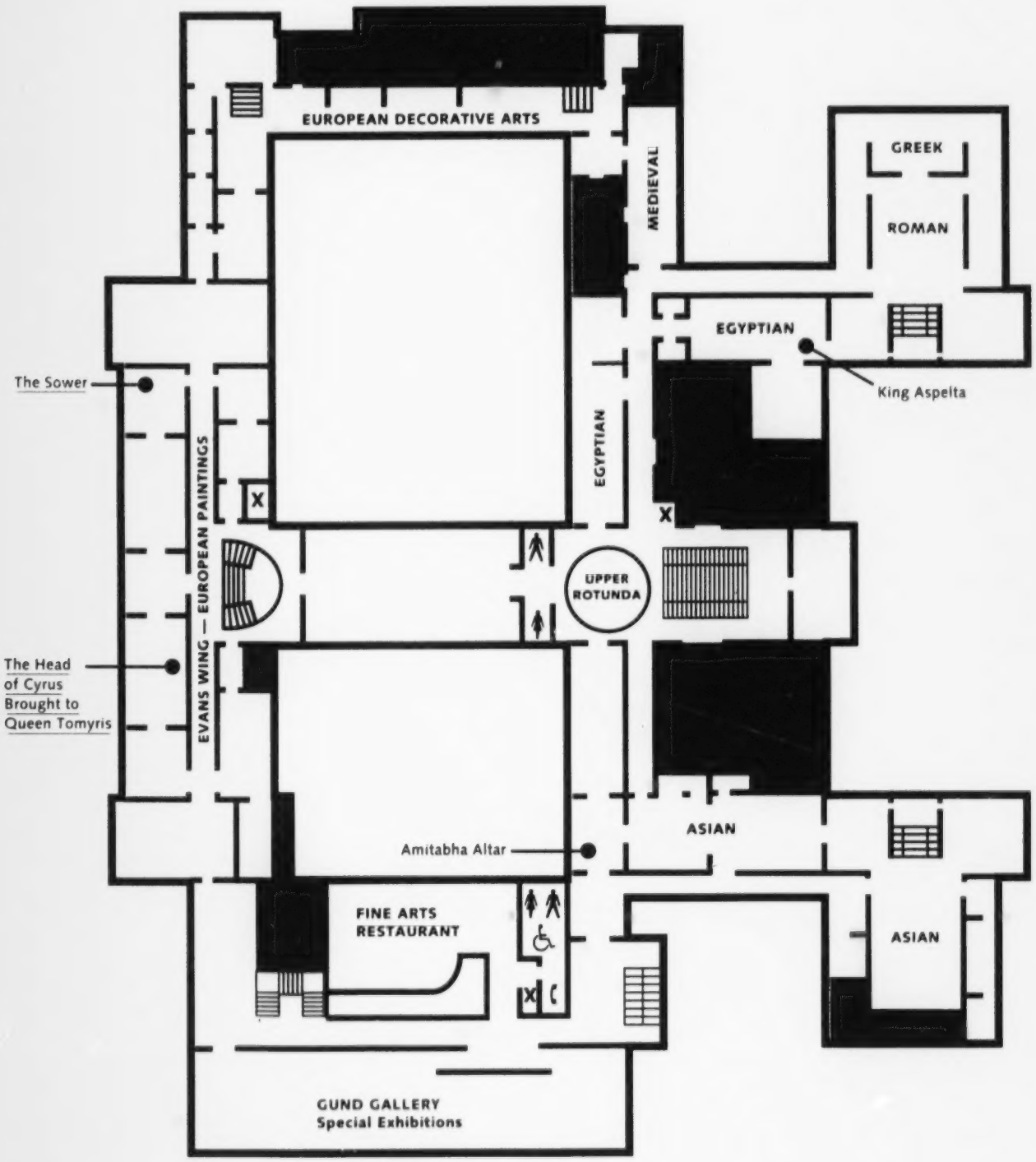


1 **FIRST FLOOR**

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Note: The works of art discussed here are usually on view, but occasionally they may be moved or taken off exhibition (for conservation, for a special exhibition,or for some other reason). Please visit the galleries to check the location of objects you want to work with **before** you bring your students.

MFA CONNECTIONS: Images of Power



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

2 SECOND FLOOR

CHINA

Discussion Questions

Look closely at this sculpture and describe all the things you see.

Who do you think is the most important figure in this sculpture? Why?

What do you think the Buddha's hand gestures might mean?

Why do you think the figures are all different sizes?

How did the artist think about arranging the different figures?

How do you think the artist wanted this to be seen?

What kind of feeling do you get from this work? Why?

How do you think this object was used? Where do you think it might have been placed? Why?

What is an altar?

What different kinds of things do people do in front of an altar?

What does this work reveal about the people of this culture?

What similar things do we have in our culture?

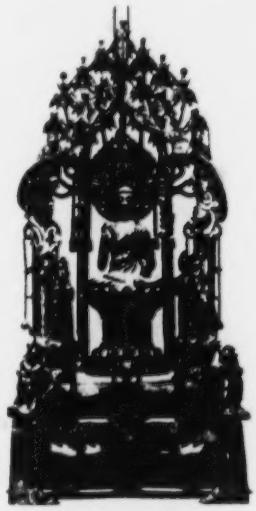
Do you feel this is an object/image of power? Why or why not?

Altar Dedicated to the Buddha of Infinite Light (Amitabha)
Sui dynasty, A.D. 593 22.407 and 47.1407–1412

A group of eight mothers from a wealthy Chinese family clan commissioned this altarpiece in the hope of ensuring their rebirths, as well as the rebirths of their children and ancestors, in paradise. They believed that faithful followers who invoked the name of the Buddha of Infinite Light would be born again into this paradise. This altar was placed inside the home, where family members would come to pray, sometimes offering incense, flowers, and candles. The typical Chinese home was built around an open courtyard, and it is possible that the sculpture's hanging pieces were made to be moved by the wind and act as a chime.

The setting of this sculpture is the Western Paradise, the heavenly home of the Buddha of the Infinite Light, who was known as Amitabha. We find the Buddha enthroned under a flowering tree and seated cross-legged on a lotus flower. (This flower is known to grow out of the mud of the earth, rise up through water, and blossom into the light of the sky. Because of this transformation, the lotus flower is a symbol of strength and rebirth.) Seven tiny images of the Buddhas of the Past are seated on the tips of the branches of the tree. Three angels, their wings folded back, swoop down from above. The Buddha is attended by several figures: two bodhisattvas (or compassionate deities) standing on lotus flowers at the corners and, closer to him, two pairs of saints or monks. In front, on a lower level, are two guardian kings, two lions, and an incense burner supported by a dwarf.

To suggest this light-filled paradise, the sculpture was made of bronze (a combination of copper and tin) and in its original form would have been covered with a thin layer of gold.



OTHER OBJECTS IN THIS GALLERY

Ritual flaying knife 1987.256

Curved knives such as this one symbolize the cutting away of negative qualities as a means to spiritual liberation, a crucial concept in esoteric Buddhist thought and ceremony. A wrathful deity is often depicted holding such a knife in the right hand and a skull cup of blood in the left. The Sanskrit inscription on the blade is the mantra (sacred syllables) of the wrathful protective deity Mahakala.

Four Divine Guardians 10.301, 10.302, 20.720, and 20.721

Ritual implement in the shape of a dragon 1989.108

NUBIA

Discussion Questions

What is the first thing you notice about Aspelta?

How would you describe his expression? His stance and gesture?

Looking at his eyes, can you imagine where he is looking or what he is thinking?

Why do you suppose he is the size he is?

What do you think the sculptor was trying to express in this portrait of Aspelta?

Consider the material (black granite) that this figure was sculpted from. What do you feel the material expresses about this person?

Where do you think a sculpture like this might have been placed?

How do you think this work of art was looked upon by society?

What do we have in our culture that is similar to these sculptures of Aspelta and Anlamani?

How would you compare this sculpture of Aspelta to the sculpture of the one we just saw of Buddha?

Do you consider this sculpture an image of power? Why or why not?

Statue of King Aspelta
600–580 B.C. 20.730

King Aspelta and his brother King Anlamani (in this same gallery, to the left) were two powerful Nubian kings who ruled a kingdom called Kush, located farther up the Nile in what is now the Sudan. They rightfully claimed their throne as descendants of Nubian pharaohs who once ruled Egypt. These colossal sculptures stood with other royal figures in the courtyard of the Great Temple of Amun at Napata, the capital city and chief religious center of Kush. In 1916, many of these sculptures were found by the Museum expedition, and their heads and noses had been broken off, deliberately damaged by troops of a rival king who wished to "kill" them.

This was one of the magnificent stone sculptures created by Nubians in honor of their rulers. Aspelta is seen here as a powerful figure, grand in scale, walking with a strong and confident stride. A typical royal headdress made from tall feathers crowns his head. Two cobras, symbols of power and life, decorate the top of his skullcap. He wears a pleated linen kilt wrapped around his body and belted at his waist. Craftsmen using hammers and chisels carved this sculpture from black granite, a kind of stone found in the region. Some of the surfaces are polished smooth, while others were left rough so that gold leaf would adhere.

OTHER OBJECTS IN THIS GALLERY

Statue of King Anlamani 20.732

GREECE

Discussion Questions

Describe this sculpture.

What can you say about this figure by looking at the position of her body and her gesture? Do you ever stand like this? When?

How would you describe her expression?

Do you think she is afraid of the snakes? Why or why not?

What materials were used to make this sculpture?

Why do you think these materials were chosen for this sculpture?

Why do you think she was made to be so small?

Where do you think this sculpture might have been kept—in a public or private setting?

What feeling do you get from looking at this sculpture?

How does this sculpture compare with the sculpture of King Aspelta? Imagine these two sculptures were the same size; how would it change your impression of them?

Do you regard her as an image of power? Why or why not?

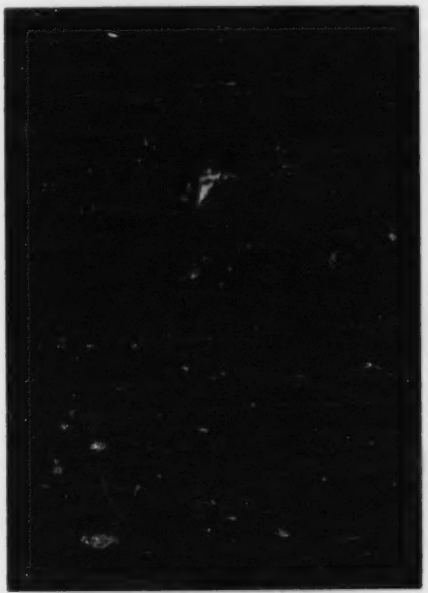
What small objects can you think of that are very powerful?

Snake Goddess
600–1500 B.C. 14.863

This sculpture is a bit of a mystery, for it is not known exactly where this statue was originally placed or how it was used. In the Minoan religion, women seem to have been very powerful figures. This object may have served an important function in a ritual ceremony honoring the power of the priestess. It is also possible that it may have been used to represent the divine goddess who ruled the sky, the earth, and the underworld. (In the Minoan culture, the Snake Goddess is associated with the forces of life and regeneration, the snake being a symbol of the fertility of the earth and rebirth because snakes shed one skin and grow another.)

The Snake Goddess is diminutive, only 6 1/2 inches tall, but her pose and expression convey a great deal of power. Her strong presence is felt through her physically strong figure, which she holds in an erect and rigid pose. We can read in her face a serious and unyielding expression. Coiled about her extended arms are two gold cobras with upturned heads and eyes. This sculpture is made from the precious materials ivory and gold, which were imported to the island of Crete from Africa. The goddess is dressed in typical royal dress, an embroidered flounced skirt with an open bodice. She originally wore a high headdress or crown of gold, indicated by the tiny holes encircling her head.

The island of Crete was the center of Minoan civilization, named after the legendary Cretan king Minos. In Knossos, an ancient Cretan city, a richly elaborate palace was built for the king. This sculpture may have been part of the palace treasury and may have served to protect the king's household.



OTHER OBJECTS IN THIS GALLERY

At the far end of the gallery to your right you will find:

Votive axe 58.1009

This golden double axe was found in a sacred Minoan cave and may have been used in ritual ceremonies. The double axe was a religious symbol and often found in fresco paintings and on other decorated objects.

GREECE

Imagine you can give the Snake Goddess a voice. What would she have to say? To whom would she speak? What tone of voice would she use?

Is there any place that you might want to utilize the Snake Goddess's power in your own life? What might you ask her to do for you? Where might you take her?

DISCOVERY SHEET

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Images of Power

GREECE

What small objects can you think of that have a tremendous amount of power—spiritual, social, political, personal? Describe how they are used.

If you were to create a very powerful personal object, what would it look like? What kind of power would it have? What would you want it to be able to do for you? How would you use it? Where would you put it? Write about and/or sketch your object here.

EUROPE

Discussion Questions

Describe the things you see in this painting.

Who do you think are the main characters in this scene?

What can you tell about the characters' thoughts and emotions by their expressions and their gestures?

Where do you think this takes place? Why?

Can you tell during what time in history it might be taking place?

Why do you think the artist made this painting so large?

What is the artist trying to express or describe here?

How do you think we, as viewers, are supposed to feel?

What sort of power is being displayed here?

Where can we find images today that tell of political power or abuse of power in our society?

Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) and Studio
The Head of Cyrus Brought to Queen Tomyris, about 1622 41.40

This is the climax of a story told by the ancient Greek historian Herodotus of a battle between the Persians, led by the great king Cyrus, and a tribe from Central Asia, the Massagetae. During the battle, the son of the Massagetae queen, Queen Tomyris, was slain by Cyrus. In revenge for this act, the queen ordered the death of Cyrus and requested that his head be brought to her.

Gathered around the queen is a group of men and women, richly clad in silks, velvet, and furs, who have assembled as witnesses. Queen Tomyris is accompanied by her retinue of women and young pages (thought to be the five- and nine-year-old sons of the artist). A servant kneels over the blood-filled bowl, and figures in the crowd seem alternately fascinated and horrified by the grisly sight. The scale and composition of this work invite the viewer to become a participant in this gruesome event. The painting seems to be set in the courtyard of an ornately decorated palace.

OTHER OBJECTS IN THIS GALLERY

In contrast to the Rubens painting, which presents an act of political and physical power, the following works illustrate spiritual power through an act of prayer and faith.

Circle of Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669), Old Man in Prayer, about 1630
03.1080

In the next gallery:

El Greco (Domenicos Theotocopoulos, called El Greco) (1541–1614), Saint Catherine of Alexandria, about 1610–1614 1993.38

El Greco was a visionary artist who created impassioned religious paintings that earned him the patronage of the powerful Spanish Church hierarchy. This is a portrait of St. Catherine, an eloquent and learned follower of Christianity, persecuted for her religious beliefs by Maximus II in the third century. One can see under her hand one of the spiked wheels on which she was condemned to torture. She was saved by God's order when lightning struck and broke the wheels, setting her free.

EUROPE

Discussion Questions

What do you see happening in this painting?

What can you tell about this figure by looking at his expression and gesture?

Where and when do you think this scene take place?

Why do you think the artist wanted to create such a large picture of this kind of person?

How would you describe the mood in this work? How has the artist achieved it?

How would you say this painting compares with the Rubens painting and with the other portraits in that gallery? Consider the type of person portrayed, the setting, the color, and the way it is painted.

What message or meaning does this image have for you?

Is it a powerful image? Why or why not?

Jean François Millet (1814–1875)
The Sower, 1850 17.1485

With a length of cloth tied across his chest and gathered up in his left hand to form a bag for the seed grain, the sower strides across the broken ground of a Norman hillside. Behind him, another farmer rides an ox-drawn harrow as it closes the soil over the sown grain. The sower's legs are wrapped in straw for warmth, and his cap is pulled down over his ears, for the sowing of winter wheat is done in November. The last rays of a setting sun dissolve the harrower and his team in ruddy light and cast the sower's face in dark shadow.

The sowing of the grain is an image of faith, an analogy often referred to in religious texts. The grain is flung to the winds, in the hope of harvests far beyond the control of the sower. In Catholic France, the sower often began his task by crossing himself or by forming a cross with a handful of grain flung into the air in two strokes.

Millet's portrayal of a working-class figure in mythical proportions is unusual for its time. Paintings of wealthy and powerful figures were much more common. With *The Sower*, Millet brought the peasant from the background of so many paintings to the foreground of a picture of his own. In this way, he was reinstating the three-quarters of the French population who earned their daily bread by the sweat of their brow into the main cultural forum of the day. Millet's art was revolutionary in its assertion that ordinary men and women and the most commonplace activities were worthy subjects for serious art. He insisted that his art was not political, but in a time of social unrest, many Parisians found this powerful figure challenging, if not threatening.

OTHER OBJECTS IN THIS GALLERY

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On), 1840 99.22

This painting, based on a true story, is at once beautiful and disturbing. The power of the oncoming storm is palpable, sensed through the rich texture and the furious swirling of paint. One can almost feel the dampness of the sea mist in this painting. Turner captures the radiance of sunlight as it mixes with the tumultuous motion of wind and water.

AMERICA

Discussion Questions

Where is your eye drawn to first in this painting? Why? Describe what you see.

Compare the left side of the painting with the right side. How are they different in terms of the landscape, season, and time of day?

What sorts of feelings do you get looking at the different sides of the painting?

Consider how light and color are used. What do they convey to you?

How would you compare this image of paradise with the image of the Western Paradise in the Chinese altarpiece?

What different kinds of power are represented in this painting?

What message or meaning does this painting convey to you?

Thomas Cole (1801–1848)
Expulsion from the Garden of Eden, 1828 47.1188

Driven out of a tropical paradise into the nightmarish, forbidding wilderness, Adam and Eve are followed by the wrath of God, represented by a radiant light. Because their figures are small and their faces hidden, it is difficult to know at first who these characters are and what familiar story is being told. Adam and Eve appear as two anonymous figures lost among the ruins of a devastated forest. In this dark side of the painting, ravens and coyotes move among dead trees, a volcano erupts in the distance, a strong wind blows, and the sun does not shine.

Cole's painting is an urgent appeal to the viewer to realize the fragile balance that exists between civilization and nature.

Drawing on the English romantic tradition, Cole was interested in the confrontation of nature and humans. He, like so many other romantics, felt himself being spiritually displaced by the rapid advance of civilization. To him, the American wilderness was the last vestige of paradise, and preserving it offered a key to the salvation of humankind. Nature was the visible expression of God; defilement of nature was tantamount to original sin.

Thomas Cole was born in Lancashire, England, and emigrated with his family to the United States as a teenager. He studied painting in the midwest and, having little success in his attempt to make a career as a portrait painter, decided to move to New York to try his luck there. A journey up the Hudson River inspired him to make several landscapes, all of which were well-received. He was considered the founder of a style of landscape painting called the Hudson River School.

OTHER OBJECTS IN THIS GALLERY

Washington Allston (1779–1843), Elijah in the Desert, 1818 70.1

This painting is a based on a biblical story from Kings I:17, in which God orders the prophet Elijah to venture into the desert alone as a test of the power of his faith. There, in a dry, barren land, Elijah is miraculously kept alive by ravens who bring him bread and meat.

Washington Allston, The Poor Author and the Rich Bookseller, 1811 27.220

AMERICA

Discussion Questions

What is your first impression of this painting?

Describe some of the things you see. Based on these observations, what do you think this painting might be about?

The artist titled this *Old Brooklyn Bridge*. If you were to follow his bridge through the painting, where would it lead you?

What thought or feeling about this place is the artist trying to express?

Do you think the artist was trying to paint this as he actually saw it?

What feelings/sensations do you experience when you look into this painting? Why?

In what way do you think this is a symbol of power?

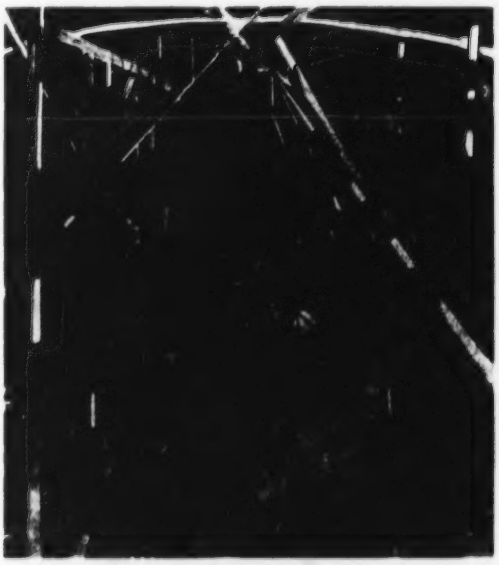
What structure/building in today's world is, in your opinion, an image of power? Why?

This painting was created about 1941. Consider what things were taking place in our country then. Can you think of what new inventions and/or movements were changing the face of the world at that time?

Joseph Stella (1877–1946)
Old Brooklyn Bridge, about 1941 1980.197

The Brooklyn Bridge, completed in 1883, came to symbolize for many people the hope and glory of the engineering and industrial strength in America. In the essay "Brooklyn Bridge, A Page of My Life," Joseph Stella writes about how he was intrigued by this remarkable structure: "Seen for the first time, as a weird metallic apparition under a metallic sky, it impressed me as the shrine containing all the efforts of the new civilization of America...Many nights I stood on the bridge, alone, lost, prey to the surrounding darkness. Here and there were lights, the underground tumult of the trains in perpetual motion, the shrill voice of the trolley wires...I felt deeply moved, as if on the threshold of a new religion or in the presence of a new Divinity."

Moving to New York in 1896, when he was nineteen years old, from his home in Italy, Stella worked as a magazine illustrator for several years and studied painting with American Impressionist painter William Merritt Chase. In 1909, Stella decided to go to Europe to travel and paint. There, he discovered the work of the avant-garde cubist and futurist painters. When he returned to New York, he settled in Brooklyn and began creating a series of paintings based on his observations and memories of the Brooklyn Bridge and other great modern architectural structures. In these paintings, Stella was most interested in capturing the experience of city life—the sensations of space, sound, light, and movement. His compositions, often fragments of images, reflect his own personal vision of the reality of modern life. Artists such as Stella were compelled to invent new art forms and experiment with new ways of painting in response to the changing political, social, scientific, and philosophical climate of the new world.



OTHER OBJECTS IN THIS GALLERY

Hans Hofmann (1880–1966), Twilight, 1957 1973.171

This painting explores the issue of the power of the artist's material—in this case, the expressive power of paint. It seems almost to be the subject of this composition. Hofmann liberally applied the paint onto the surface with a trowel in such a way that the canvas almost becomes a sculptural relief. A significant aspect of this work lies in its ambiguity and its openness to many interpretations.

DISCOVERY SHEET

AMERICA

Imagine that you have entered Joseph Stella's painting *Old Brooklyn Bridge* and have begun to take a walk around inside it. Describe what sounds and smells you might experience if you were in this scene. If you could explore one part of this cityscape, what passages would you take and where would they lead you? What sort of adventure do you envision for yourself?

Find a painting or sculpture in this gallery that is especially powerful to you. Write about where in the work this power lies.

AMERICA

Find the painting called *Twilight*, by Hans Hofmann. Describe your thoughts and feelings about this painting. What is your first impression of this painting? What things in this painting do you recognize? Why do you think the artist used his paint in this way? How do you imagine it felt to paint in this manner? What other questions does this painting raise for you?

AMERICA

Discussion Questions

Have you ever seen anything like this anywhere before?

How is it like/unlike the other Museum works you've seen?

What other kinds of signs does this remind you of? (The stock market boards, Times Square sign, advertising signs, headlines, televison news flashes, etc.)

What messages do you see?

What do you notice about the way the messages move across the board?

How does it feel to watch/read this? Why?

In what ways does this work surprise you?

Consider all the artist's choices and decisions in putting this work together.

Why do you think the artist chose this particular medium?

What does this work reveal about our culture?

Do you consider this a work of art? A good one?

Is it a powerful image to you? Why or why not?

Do you agree or disagree with some of the things being said here?

Note: This work of art appears over the doorway to the Foster Gallery, in the West Wing. Teachers may want to use discretion in viewing this work with younger students, as it contains adult language.

Jenny Holzer, b.1950, Selections from Truisms, Inflammatory Essays, The Living Series, The Survival Series, Under a Rock, Laments, and Child Text, 1991 1991.1099

Words are Holzer's medium, and her work appears in the form of texts, essays, posters, and more recently, computerized signs like this one, called LED (light-emitting diode) signs. She uses the language of the street—jive, rap, gossip, and one-liners in the tradition of graffiti. Her messages express her thoughts on a variety of topics—anger, pain, fear, violence, aging, death, gender, religion, and politics.

Holzer describes her concerns this way: "From the beginning, my work has been designed to be stumbled across in the course of a person's daily life. The sign is a different medium because it has a very big memory; when you put them in a public situation you might have thousands of people watching. I was interested in the efficiency of signs as well as the shock value the signs have when programmed with my peculiar material. A great feature of the signs is their capacity to move, which I love because it is so much like the spoken word; you can emphasize things; you can roll and pause, which is the kinetic equivalent to inflection in the voice. I was struck by the shaping of words and letters, their size and type, their flickering. All seem to me very important in terms of emotional tone — what you want somebody to feel about what is being said."

Jenny Holzer grew up in Ohio and began her career as an abstract painter at the Rhode Island School of Design. As a young student, Holzer became interested in the idea of art serving as an instrument of social change. Rejecting the idea of becoming a social-realist painter, she decided to move to New York City to create public art that would reach a larger audience within an urban environment.

A STRONG SENSE OF DUTY IMPRISONS YOU.

ABUSE OF POWER COMES AS NO SURPRISE.

ALIENATION PRODUCES ECCENTRICS OR REVOLUTIONARIES.

AMBIVALENCE CAN RUIN YOUR LIFE.

AMERICA

DISCOVERY

Working with a partner, write down some of the messages that appear on the board. Choose one to write about. Discuss your first response. What does this mean to you? What do you think Holzer is trying to express? How would you describe the tone of the message?

In response to one or more of the messages you see before you, begin writing freely the first thoughts that enter your mind. Pass your written idea along to a classmate and take turns recording your thoughts to create a new text.

AMERICA

Create your own message that you would like to see on this board. (Your message could be written or drawn or be a combination of both.) What would you want to say to other Museum visitors?

Images of Power

SUGGESTIONS FOR PRE-VISIT AND POST-VISIT PROJECTS

General

Open up the discussion by asking students to list the different kinds of power in the world—natural, physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual, verbal, political, military, etc. These could be discussed generally or as they pertain to a current class theme or unit.

Ask students to bring in postcards, photographs, posters, or pictures from magazines or calendars that they feel illustrate some form of power. As they are presented to the class, students could respond to the images by analyzing them according to their message, composition, color, light, and other aspects that they think are important in determining power. Questions to spark discussion might be: What do these images convey? What do you find powerful in them? Is your response an emotional or an intellectual one?

After critically viewing a selection of television shows (MTV, news, dramas, sitcoms, as well as advertising), students could consider how the media creates powerful images and messages. Based on their observations and discussions, students might collaborate to create their own cultural statements by making a video/audio collage (using a video camera) using collected images and soundtracks from television broadcasts. Other options might be to ask students to critique various television shows analyzing character, plot, scenes, scripts, and camera shots. Students could also create or perform a rock video or commercial for the class.

In words or pictures, students could create an object of power. What kind of power would it have? What would it be made from? How big or small would it be? Where would it be kept? Who would use it?

After the Museum of Fine Arts visit, begin a discussion reviewing all the art seen with students. The class could make a comparative study of the works by reflecting on the ways they are different from one another. Some aspects to consider might be: the artist's choice of medium; the form—the two- or three-dimensionality of the work; the type of representation—whether it is naturalistic or symbolic; the historical and religious significance and context of the work; the work as public or private vision, i.e., whether it was created out of a public need as opposed to from one artist's vision. This conversation might lead to the topic of the function of art and the artist's role in society.

Students could propose a design for an exhibition entitled "Images of Power." Working in small groups, students will take on the role of curators and consider what objects and/or artworks will be included in their exhibit. (These works could be anything that the students feel are powerful and significant in their lives and might include pictures, music, dances, personal objects, etc.) Each object exhibited could have an accompanying written description. In designing their floor plan, students will need to consider space, lighting, color, sound/music. These exhibitions could be presented and discussed in class.

Images of Power

SUGGESTIONS FOR PRE-VISIT AND POST-VISIT PROJECTS

Through looking at slides, posters, or postcards, students could review the works seen during the MFA visit and consider creating a musical interpretation of each work. Students could divide into small groups (the artwork could be selected by each group through a random drawing) and consider how they might represent the piece through sound. Musical instruments (real or invented) or found objects might be utilized for these presentations. A similar project might involve students in creating movement/dance interpretations of the artworks. After each group performance, the class could guess what work the composition was based on.

China

One project might involve students dramatizing the Buddha of Infinite Light. There are many characters to be studied in this sculpture. What are their stories and what might they be saying to one another? The family patrons who commissioned the work might also be characterized. Students could design and perform short skits with musical accompaniment. They might also consider how movement/dance could be incorporated in their presentation.

Students could design an object for an altar (made for public or private use) and consider who or what it would be in honor of. What ritual would one perform in front of it? This could be a creative writing project that could take the form of a drawing, painting, collage, or sculpture.

The class could discuss the rituals performed daily and on special occasions in our culture. What do they involve? What is their purpose? Students might then create their own ritual, either a personal activity or ceremony they often practice or a public rite or ceremony. This ritual could be described in writing or performed for the class. Students could use musical instruments, costumes, ritual objects, and any props they might need for their performance.

Greece

Students could research the gods and goddesses of other cultures who have some connection with animals. Who are they? What are their powers? What significance do the animals have to them? Students could choose a special kind of animal they particularly love or admire and consider its attributes and strengths. They might create an image of power using this animal as a basis for inspiration.

America

Responding to the light and the dark sides of Cole's painting (using a slide or postcard of the work in the classroom), students could create a written or visual composition that expresses their thoughts and feelings about the two parts. This could be in the form of a poem, journal entry, drawing, etc.

Students could imagine a dialogue that takes place between Adam and Eve as they leave the Garden of Eden. This conversation could be in written form,

SUGGESTIONS FOR PRE-VISIT AND POST-VISIT PROJECTS

in any language. This script might become the basis for a dramatic class presentation. This project might inspire a conversation about departures and transitions. Ask students to think about an experience where they had to depart from some place or situation. They could describe this event and how it made them feel. This description could be in words or pictures.

Students could consider the state of the earth today, and the class might discuss the balance of life between humans and our planet. In pairs or small groups, have students draw a picture with two halves depicting what might have been and what has become of the earth due to human indifference and carelessness.

Ask students to think of a particular place or site that they often go to (in real life or in their dreams). What sorts of things do they see and feel when they are there? What is it about that place that keeps them returning there? How do their impressions of that place/thing change each time they visit? Have them keep a journal/sketchbook to document their experiences.

Students could create their own design—drawing, collage, sculpture—of a monument/icon that represents our culture today. They could consider what events/inventions/beliefs/customs have come to symbolize or glorify contemporary life.

Have students create a still object or paint a still life using a subject that is full of motion and change. Discuss ways in which students have expressed a sense of motion in their work.

From their notes taken at the Museum, students could select one message from Holzer's board and consider expressing it in another medium. In writing, they could describe why they have chosen this particular medium. Is there another Museum work that might illustrate or compare with this message?

Mythology East and West

OVERVIEW

Myths are compelling stories that carry important information about life in general and life within a society in particular. Passed on in spoken and written form through the centuries, myths are still told and studied today. Sometimes myths that originated in one society were adopted by another society and used along with their own myths. Myths endure because the beliefs they carry are important to individuals in a society, as well as to that society as a whole. As Joseph Campbell put it in *The Power of Myth*, "the myth is a public dream, the dream is a private myth."

Part of the universal appeal of myths is that they explore the relationships between gods and human beings by explaining cosmic events, tracing the history of a culture, or laying out codes of behavior for mortals and for gods. In this Museum visit, students will explore selected myths from different cultures, looking at the ways different kinds of mythological stories have been portrayed in works of art. Students will learn how these works of art—and the myths that inspired them—reflect the culture in which they were created. Students will also be invited to consider the myths, heroes, and heroines of contemporary society.

Here is a brief overview of the works of art and the aspects of mythology you will explore in the MFA's collections:

India

In mythological stories, gods and goddesses often take on unusual or surprising forms as evidence of their divine powers. Unlike mere mortals, gods and goddesses can change their shapes (and can also transform others') and can combine human and animal forms. In this gallery, students will learn how the Hindu god Ganesha got his elephant head and why the goddess Durga needed more than two arms.

Egypt

In very early times, ancient Egyptians believed that spirits dwelt in the earth, sky, and water, and they worshipped these gods in the form of animals. Later, the gods took on human characteristics as well. In the Egyptian galleries, students can identify different gods by their animal heads (and other attributes) and see how the gods were part of one Egyptian's journey to the afterlife.

Greece

The ancient Greeks represented their gods as human, but in the most ideal form. Students will explore the different powers of the goddess Athena by studying a reduced copy of the monumental statue that was made for the Parthenon.

Europe

From the Middle Ages on, representations of the Virgin Mary holding the Christ Child were the most popular of Christian images. Through careful observation, students will see how the concepts of divinity were conveyed through images of a mother and child.

Mythology East and West

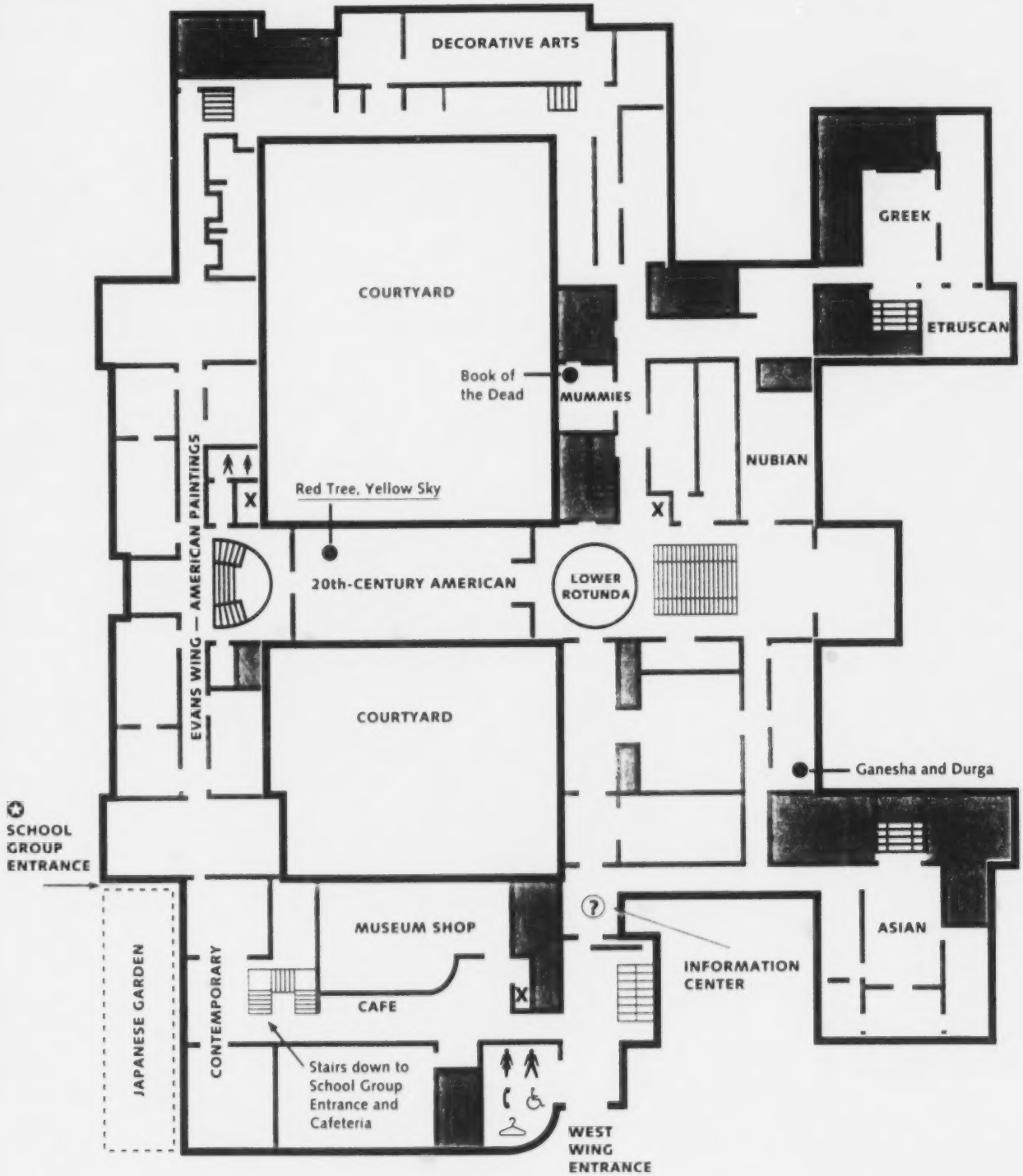
China

The Buddhist deity Guanyin has attained enlightenment but has chosen to remain among humankind to help others achieve it. Comparing two versions of Guanyin, students will learn how his special characteristics are conveyed through symbols and body language. Students will also look at images of China's most important mythological creature, the dragon.

America

While artists have consistently drawn on traditional mythology for inspiration, twentieth-century artist Georgia O'Keeffe preferred to create a more personal mythological world, based on the landscape in which she lived and worked. O'Keeffe used the dramatic forms and colors of the American Southwest as a basis for her painting *Red Tree, Yellow Sky*.

MFA CONNECTIONS: Mythology East and West

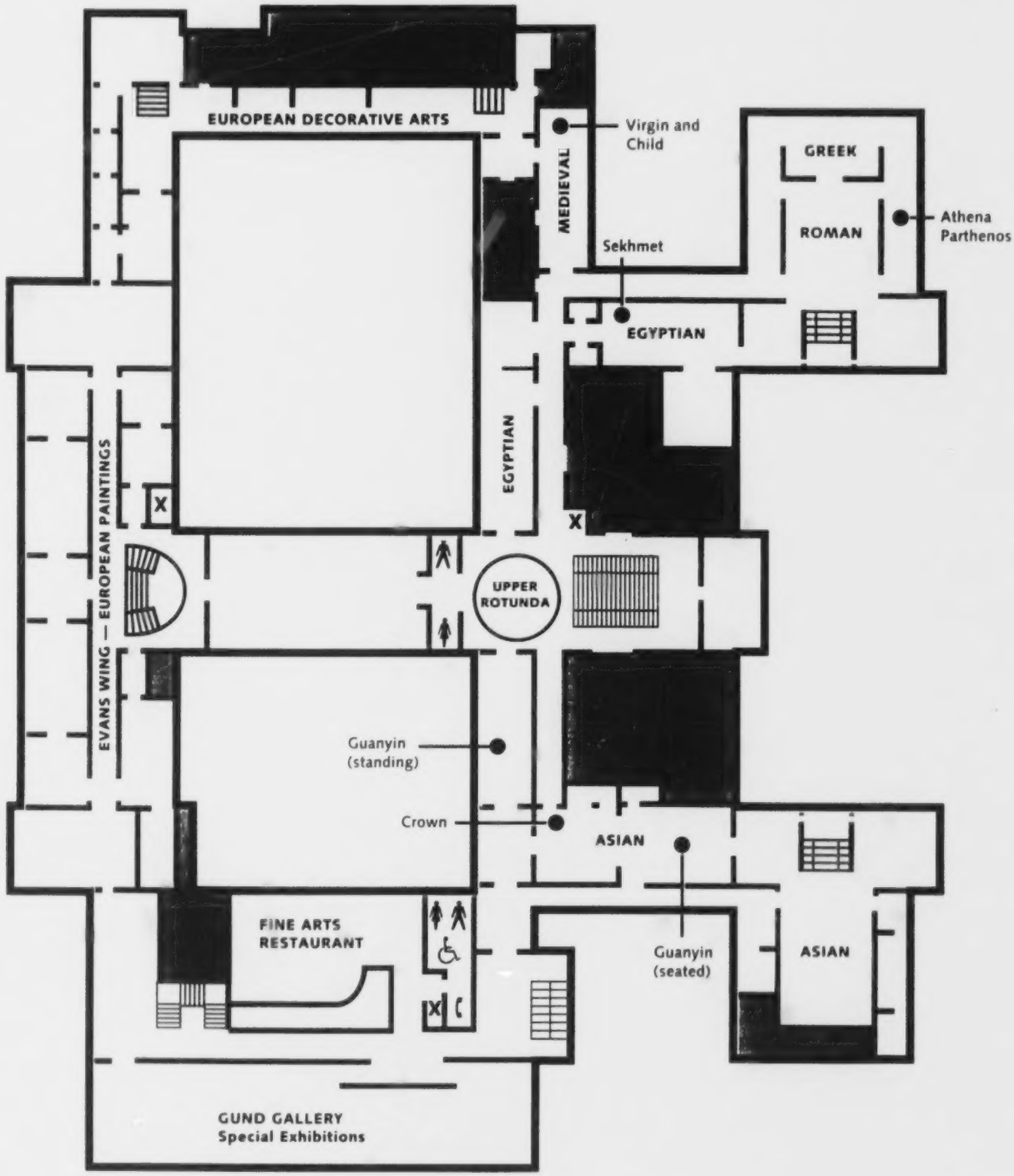


BEST COPY AVAILABLE

1 FIRST FLOOR

Note: The works of art discussed here are usually on view, but occasionally they may be moved or taken off exhibition (for conservation, for a special exhibition,or for some other reason). Please visit the galleries to check the location of objects you want to work with **before** you bring your students.

MFA CONNECTIONS: Mythology East and West



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

2 SECOND FLOOR

INDIA

Discussion Questions

First make an inventory of everything you notice about this sculpture (don't forget to note the material it is made of).

How many arms does Ganesha have? How many other creatures appear with him? What kinds of clothing and jewelry do they wear?

What physical characteristics does Ganesha have that suggest power?

What are the benefits of having both human and animal traits? What are the benefits of having more than two arms?

Now that you've spent some time looking and thinking about Ganesha, how would you characterize him overall? What aspects are appropriate for his role as the god of new beginnings?

Consider the superheroes of today who combine human and animal form (e.g., Spiderman, Batman). What advantages/disadvantages do these combinations involve?

Ganesha with His Consorts
Late tenth–early eleventh century 1989.312

This sandstone sculpture shows Ganesha, the rotund Hindu god of good fortune and remover of obstacles, sitting beneath a canopy in a casual, cross-legged pose, holding his two female companions on either side of his ample lap. The young women (who are called yakshis and represent the life force) each embrace Ganesha with one arm and hold a broken tusk or a bowl of sweets (which clearly Ganesha loves to eat) in the other. The snake that appears at Ganesha's waist acts as a belt to restrain his belly, which is filled with sweets. Beneath the group are two small female worshippers and, in the center, a rat, the animal Ganesha rides (the difference in size of the two creatures adds a note of humor). Once scared by the rat, the snake allowed Ganesha's belly to burst and the sweets to fall out; the moon laughed at Ganesha, who in a fury broke off one of his tusks and tried to throw it at the moon in an unsuccessful attempt to kill it.

One of the most popular gods in India today, Ganesha is invoked at beginnings of various kinds, such as building a house, taking a journey, or writing a book. His image is placed near entrances to temples (as was this one) or homes, at bridges, and today also in airports. He is the god of wisdom as well, and one legend has it that he wrote the great epic *The Mahabarata* with his tusk.

One legend about his birth says that he was created by his mother, the goddess Parvati, to guard the door of her bath one day when her husband Shiva was away. When Shiva arrived home unexpectedly, Ganesha refused to let him in. Not recognizing his new son, Shiva became enraged and cut off his head. On learning Ganesha's identity, the remorseful Shiva promised to give him the head of the first creature he encountered, which happened to be an elephant.

INDIA

Discussion Questions

Try to identify the objects Durga is holding in her hands (because the stone has worn away over time, some of the objects are hard to distinguish). What would each object be used for in Durga's battle with Mahisha?

After you have identified the various weapons Durga holds, have students take on Durga's pose. How does it feel to stand like this?

How has the sculptor told the story of Durga's victory over Mahisha?

Compare the images of Durga and Ganesha. How are they similar? Different?

If you were going to create a superheroine today, what weapons and/or tools would you give her?

Durga as the Slayer of the Buffalo Demon
Eighth century 27.171

This stone image of the goddess Durga would have been placed in a niche on the outside wall of a Hindu temple to Shiva. She holds in her eight hands a sword, a shield, a bow and arrow, a dart, a trident, a discus, and a conch—the weapons loaned to her by other Hindu gods to help her conquer the half-human, half-buffalo demon Mahisha (the creature under her feet). She wears an elaborate crown and jewelry, evidence of her elevated status.

One story about Durga's origin is set after a great war between the gods and the demons. After defeating the gods, the buffalo demon-king, Mahisha, ruled heaven, wrought havoc on Earth, and threatened to upset the cosmic order of the universe. The gods gathered together to plan how to defeat Mahisha. From their collective energies, they exhaled their wrath and created a new goddess of unsurpassable strength. She was called Durga, and with the help of weapons from the other gods, along with her own energy, she was able to kill the demon-king and restore order to the universe.

OTHER OBJECTS IN THIS GALLERY

Shiva the Everlasting 42.120

Shiva and Parvati 21.1720

Ganesha's parents, Shiva and Parvati, appear in several other sculptures in this gallery. See what more can you learn about them by looking at other images.

Mythology East and West

INDIA

Imagine for a moment that you are a visitor from Mars who was just beamed down to study something called "mythology" on Earth. You see this statue of Ganesha and hear the story of his origin and current role in Hindu worship today. Beamed back up to your ship to write your report, you know nothing else about "mythology" on Earth. From this limited knowledge, which of the following statements would you include in your report and why?

Mythology involves:

- beings that are part human and part animal
- the birth or creation of gods
- the power of nature
- conflict between fathers and sons
- unusual medical practices that cure disease
- violent death and coming back to life
- special ceremonies to ward off evil
- how to live a moral life

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Mythology East and West

INDIA

Create a new mythological character with a human body and the head of another creature (either real or imagined) and sketch it. Then write a story about this new being explaining how and why it was created. What are its special powers?

Mythology East and West

EGYPT

Discussion Questions

Describe the characters and the objects that you see. Can you figure out what is going on in this scene just by looking? Can you tell who is mortal and who is a god? How?

Can you predict what the outcome of the judgment scene will be?

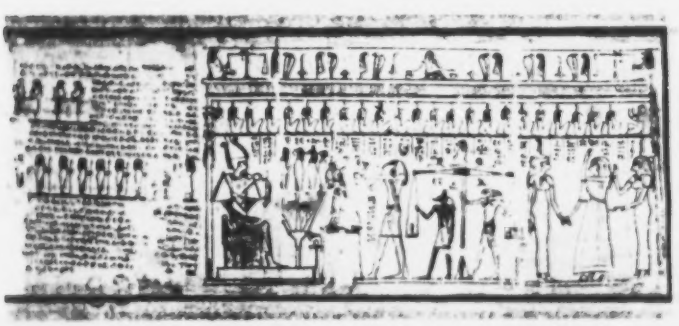
What would you say is the most important message of this story?

Weighing of the Heart Scene, Book of the Dead of Ta-Amun, Chantress of Amun, 332–31 B.C. 92.2582

The ancient Egyptians believed that to die was to begin a new life in a world that would be similar, but much better, than life in the ordinary world. To reach this paradise, the spirit of the deceased had to complete a difficult journey, meeting challenges and answering questions asked by menacing demons along the way. People were often buried with a papyrus scroll, known as the Book of the Dead. It contained magic spells, instructions, and answers that would protect and guide the spirit during its journey to the underworld.

This Book of the Dead was prepared for Ta-Amun, a singer in the Temple of Amun. On the right, Ta-Amun is ushered into the judgment hall by the Two Truths, identified by the feather of truth on their heads; one stands behind the singer, urging her on, while the other, holding an ankh (the symbol of eternal life), takes her by the hand to bring her before Osiris, the king of the underworld and judge of the dead. Osiris sits enthroned on the other side of the hall, wearing his usual high crown with feathers and holding the crook and flail, symbols of kingship. On the scales, the hawk-headed god Horus and the jackal-headed Anubis weigh the heart of Ta-Amun (in a jar on the right pan) against the feather of truth (on the left). Thoth, the ibis-headed scribe, records the result. The monster, Amamit (part lion, hippopotamus, and crocodile), crouches on a pedestal, ready to gobble up the heart if it outweighs the feather. Above the scene, seated in a line, twenty-three of the usual forty-two assessors, each wearing the feather of truth, witness the test that Ta-Amun must pass; she kneels, arms uplifted, pleading with them (at right).

In front of Osiris stand the four sons of Horus who are responsible for the internal organs after their removal from the body during mummification: Imsety, the human-headed protector of the liver; Hapy, the baboon-headed protector of the lungs; Dua-mut-ef, the jackal-headed protector of the stomach; and Qebeh-senu-ef, the hawk-headed protector of the intestines. As you look around this gallery, you will see sets of four containers called canopic jars whose lids are carved to resemble the four sons of Horus.



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

OTHER OBJECTS IN THIS GALLERY

Statue of Osiris 29.1131

The Legend of Osiris

Osiris was a good and just king. Unfortunately, he had a brother, Seth, who was so jealous of the king's power that he killed Osiris. Isis, the wife of Osiris, took her husband's body so that she could bury it properly. But Seth stole the body and cut it into pieces, which he scattered all over Egypt. Isis, with the help of her sister Nephthys, found the pieces. She magically put Osiris back together and made him live again long enough for her to have a son, Horus. (Osiris then became king of the underworld, which is why he is usually represented as a mummy.) When Horus grew up, he fought his uncle Seth for power over all Egypt. Finally, Horus won and became the supreme ruler. Horus was the god with whom the living kings of Egypt identified themselves.

Coffin lid 3.1990

Look for a scene of mummification painted on this coffin lid.

EGYPT

Discussion Questions

Describe this statue of Sekhmet in detail. Look carefully at her pose. How does it compare with Durga's pose?

Before you tell Sekhmet's story, ask students to speculate who she might be and what special powers she might have based purely on the visual evidence.

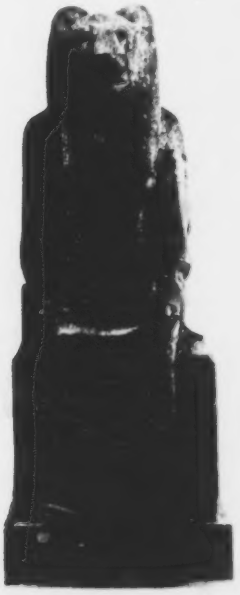
Consider how this myth is similar to the "thrillers" (books, movies) popular today.

Statue of the Goddess Sekhmet
1558–1303 B.C. 75.7

The name Sekhmet means "the powerful one" in ancient Egyptian. A goddess of war, Sekhmet is shown as a woman with the head of a lioness. During a time of dangerous illness in his realm, King Amenhotep III commissioned this statue and several hundred others exactly like it to be set up along the avenue leading to the temple of Mut at Karnak.

The lion-headed goddess sits on a block throne, holding an ankh, the symbol for life, in her left hand. She wears traditional Egyptian dress: a long wig and a tight fitting, ankle-length sheath, a broad collar around the neck, anklets and bracelets. Hieroglyphic inscriptions down either side of the front of the throne give the names of Amenhotep III and tell us that he was "beloved of Sekhmet" and that "his flesh is golden."

One of the myths involving Sekhmet begins when the sun god Re, who created the world and ruled over men and gods, discovered that men were scheming against him. He called a council of the gods; it was recommended that Sekhmet be sent to exact vengeance on the evildoers. Chasing them into the desert, she found and killed many of them, and discovering that she liked it so much, she kept on killing. Alarmed at this unexpected turn of events, Re ordered large amounts of red ocher to be stirred into seven thousand jugs of beer, making the beer look like human blood, and had it poured onto the battlefield. The next day, when Sekhmet started lapping up the disguised beer, she became very drunk and forgot about destroying the rest of mankind. Through this trick, Re saved the human race from destruction.



OTHER OBJECTS IN THIS GALLERY

Lady Sennuwy 14.720

Although made several hundred years before the statue of Sekhmet, this statue of a prominent Egyptian woman looks almost identical in pose. Discuss other similarities and differences.

Mythology East and West

EGYPT

DISCOVERY SHEET

Divide into small groups and find an object in this room that interests you and your partners. Prepare a brief presentation of that object for other members of the class, focusing on the symbols of gods and goddesses you find.

If you were to design a mummy case for yourself, what symbols would you use to ensure a long and enjoyable afterlife? Sketch them here.

Mythology East and West

GREECE

Discussion Questions

While looking at this statue of Athena, find as many mythological creatures as you can. (If you know stories about Medusa, Pegasus, or the Sphinx, this would be a good time to tell them.) Why would these creatures be appropriate to decorate Athena's armor?

Notice how Athena is standing; try to imitate her. How does this pose make you feel? Compare Athena's "body language" with other powerful goddesses you have looked at. How is it the same? Different?

What might Athena be thinking? What might she be like?

Where do we see sculptures like this in today's cities? What/who do they commemorate?

Does Athena remind you of anyone? Who?

Athena Parthenos (Athena, the Maiden Goddess)
About 150–230 1980.196

This statue is a faithful copy of a well-known statue of Athena that had been made about six hundred years earlier (around 440 B.C.) by Pheidias, the famed sculptor of the Parthenon frieze. The original stood inside the Parthenon, the main temple of the Athenian Acropolis (look for the model of the Acropolis nearby). Almost forty feet high, Pheidias' Athena was made of wood covered with ivory and gold. As the patron goddess of Athens, Athena Parthenos stood guard over the city wearing a helmet and armor, both of which are elaborately decorated with mythological creatures symbolizing her power and wisdom. Her armor features the head of Medusa, while her helmet is decorated with a pair of griffins on the cheekpieces and two images of Pegasus flanking a now-missing sphinx on the top. On her feet she wears sandals. Both her arms are now lost, but we know from contemporary descriptions that she originally held a small figure of Nike, goddess of victory, in her right hand, while her lowered left hand steadied a shield on the ground. A spear would have leaned against her left shoulder.

Of the many myths starring Athena, one tells of her contest with Poseidon for the city of Athens. Each of them was to show what they could offer the city residents, who would then choose the victor. Poseidon struck the Acropolis with his trident, and a spring gushed forth. The residents were thrilled, until they realized that the spring flowed with undrinkable saltwater. In turn, Athena caused an olive tree to grow, whose fruit could be eaten or made into oil and whose wood could be used in many useful ways. So the residents awarded Athena with their loyalty and devotion, and the city became known as Athens.

OTHER OBJECTS IN THIS GALLERY

Model of the Acropolis

The Fall of Troy Vase 59.178

Look for an old-fashioned statue of Athena in one of the two scenes from the end of the Trojan War depicted on this vase. This statue may represent the Palladium, a legendary statue said to have been sent to Troy by Zeus.

The Birth of Athena (downstairs in gallery directly underneath this one) 00.330

This vase shows the unusual circumstances of Athena's birth, as she bursts out of the head of Zeus, fully grown and armed for battle.

GREECE

DISCOVERY SHEET

Athena won her contest with Poseidon because she offered something the Athenians really wanted. Imagine that this contest is taking place in your own town or city today. Divide into teams, decide what gift you would offer the local residents, and present each offering to the class as a whole for a vote. Don't forget to specify what kind of statue you would want to commemorate this event—materials, subject matter, etc. And what will be the new name of your city?

Sketch your own version of a modern-day Athena. What is her new role? In place of the sphinx, medusa, and other symbols the ancient Greek Athena wears, create contemporary symbols of her power. Where would you want this statue to stand?

Mythology East and West

GREECE

If Athena could speak to us today, what would she say? Write a brief speech for her.

77

EUROPE

Discussion Questions

Describe Mary's pose (noticing the position of her shoes poking out from underneath her robe may help). Do the folds of her cloak reveal or conceal the position of her body?

Notice the material this sculpture is made out of; what do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of making wooden or stone sculptures?

Consider the relationship between Mary and Jesus illustrated in this sculpture—the way she holds the baby, the tilt of their heads, the direction of their glances, etc. What message do these elements convey?

What aspects of this sculpture make you think of the divine aspects of this pair? What aspects are more human?

How is this image of a mother and child different from other images (such as family snapshots) of the same subject? In what ways has the sculptor shown us that this is no ordinary mother and child?

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Virgin and Child on the Crescent Moon
About 1450–1460 65.1354

This life-size statue of the Madonna (meaning "My Lady" in Italian) and Christ Child was made for a church in Austria. The Virgin Mary is sumptuously dressed and wears a crown, referring to her revered status in the Catholic Church as the Queen of Heaven. The Baby Jesus, by contrast, wears no clothes, emphasizing his human vulnerability and reminding viewers of the way he would end his life, similarly unclothed, on the cross. This statue is in an excellent state of preservation, most of the paint and gilding being original. Look at the areas that now appear a dull red—they would have been covered with gleaming gold leaf.

According to the New Testament, Jesus was the son of the all-powerful God, who chose a human mother, Mary, to bring his son into the world. That Mary remained a virgin even after she gave birth to a son was part of the divine nature of the event. Stories of Christ's miraculous birth and precocious childhood were depicted by painters and sculptors throughout the Middle Ages. *(Continues on back.)*

Adding another dimension to the theme of mother and child, the sculptor has shown Mary standing on a crescent moon (in which half a "man in the moon" can be seen). This image is derived in part from a vision of the end of the world described by Saint John in the Book of Revelation (chapter 12, verses 1–6), where he tells of seeing "a woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars." Later interpretations identified the woman in this vision with Mary and saw it as a prediction that the end of the world would mean the beginning of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth (with Mary as Queen) for the Christian faithful.

While Mary holds the child close to her, the figures don't make eye contact, but gaze somewhat distractedly into the distance, making them accessible to all viewers. The child seems to be reaching for the pear she holds, suggesting some element of play between mother and child. The piece of fruit is certainly meant to remind the viewer of the story of Adam and Eve and the eating of the apple of wisdom that caused them to be expelled from the Garden of Eden. At this point in time, Mary and Jesus were seen as intercessors between mortals and the terrifying God of judgment, and worshippers went to them hoping to find forgiveness for their sins, so that they could spend the afterlife in heaven instead of hell.

OTHER OBJECTS IN THIS GALLERY

Virgin and Child 57.583

Virgin and Child 57.701

Looking at other versions of the same image, consider which aspect of the Virgin and Child—the human or the divine—is emphasized by different sculptors. Discuss which version you think effectively captures a balance between the two.

The Crucified Christ 51.1405

This sculpture would have been placed over an altar in a church; what emotions do you think it was meant to evoke in the viewer? Does this image seem to you to convey both the human and the divine aspects of Christ's nature?

CHINA

Discussion Questions

Walk around the standing Guanyin, noting the finely carved details of his costume and pose. Where do you think the artist wanted you to stand to see this sculpture?

Traces of red paint and gilding can still be seen on the back of the standing figure; try to describe what this sculpture would have looked like when it was first made.

Compare the standing and sitting versions of Guanyin (noting pose, expression, clothing, etc.). How are they similar? Different? If you had the choice, which of these images would you visit more often? Why?

Guanyin, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, about 580 15.254

Guanyin, twelfth century 20.590

Buddhism, which began in India, was carried along trade routes by merchants and Buddhist missionaries and reached China by the first century B.C. One of the most popular Buddhist deities is the Bodhisattva of Compassion, worshipped in China as Guanyin ("one who hears sounds"). The goal of the Buddhist worshipper is to transcend the desires and sorrows of earthly existence and to escape the endless cycle of reincarnation by achieving enlightenment. A bodhisattva is one who has attained enlightenment but who chooses to remain among humankind to help others achieve it.

The monumental stone sculpture shows Guanyin standing, richly dressed in flowing scarves and draperies ornamented with elaborate jewelry. In his raised left hand, he holds a cluster of lotus pods, and he stands upon a double lotus. The lotus is a symbol of purity and rebirth, since its white flower grows out of the mud. We know this is Guanyin because of the small seated figure of the Buddha in his headdress. Small guardian dogs sit at the four corners of his pedestal.

The painted wooden statue shows Guanyin seated in a relaxed pose, his right arm propped on a knee and holding a sash in an elegant manner. This Guanyin is also dressed in flowing robes, amply adorned with jewelry and has a small figure of the Buddha in his headdress. In China, Guanyin came to be represented with more feminine traits, to better express his compassionate nature. Unlike the earlier stone Guanyin, this one has on his forehead an an "urna," a special mark of the Buddha, from which shines the light of wisdom illuminating the universe. Here, the urna is represented by colored glass.

CHINA

Discussion Questions

Considering the precious materials and elaborate decoration of this object, think about who the owner would have been. On what kinds of occasions would it have been used?

Looking at the size of this silver gilt crown, imagine how heavy it would feel on your head and how you would feel wearing it. How would it have been fixed on your head?

Discuss what you know about dragons in Western culture. Then look at the dragons on this crown and discuss what features of a Western dragon are shared by Eastern dragons. What clues suggest that in China dragons are auspicious creatures?

The Chinese dragon is made up of parts of nine different creatures. See how many you can name. What powers would a dragon then possess?

Considering the composite powers of a dragon, discuss why the dragon is an appropriate symbol for the rulers of China.

Headgear (crown)
Early eleventh century 40.749

This precious gilded silver object was made for the Chinese imperial court, apparently to be presented to envoys of the Khitan tribes (who lived north of China) at the conclusion of a peace treaty between the Khitans and the Chinese. It was probably a headdress, the slits at each end holding some kind of ribbon to tie it securely onto the lucky owner's head. This prized possession was carried with the Khitan owner to his grave. It is decorated with two spirited dragons chasing flaming jewels.

In European mythology, dragons are nasty, fire-breathing, cave-dwelling, treasure-hoarding enemies to be feared and avoided. In Asia however, dragons are symbols of good fortune and prosperity, representing strength, goodness, and the life spirit. Dragons live in the sky, ocean, and mountains and are thought to be responsible for bringing the rains essential to a good harvest. One story of the birth of a dragon begins with an egg, which lies for a thousand years on the ocean floor, then rolls to earth for another thousand years, and spends a final thousand years in the sky. When the dragon hatches, it grows to an enormous size in the blink of an eye, so large that it disappears and becomes the world itself.

The dragon draws its unusual power from many parts of the animal world. The dragon has:

the head of a camel
the eyes of a rabbit
the horns of a deer
the scales of a fish
the ears of a bull
the whiskers of a catfish
the body of a snake
the paws of a tiger
the talons of a hawk.

OTHER OBJECTS IN THIS GALLERY

Dragon (in same case) 54.96

Covered box with inside drawer (on the left in the gallery behind the seated Guanyin) 1985.21

Look for dragons on all kinds of objects (ceramics, paintings, textiles, etc.) throughout the Asian galleries.

CHINA

DISCOVERY SHEET

Sit on the bench or floor in front of the seated Guanyin for a few moments and just look at it. Then list all the adjectives you would use to describe this statue.

Now write a postcard describing one of the statues of Guanyin to a friend or family member. Include some of your own thoughts on looking at the statue for the first time.

Mythology East and West

CHINA

You have been asked to create a musical accompaniment for Guanyin (or one of the other statues in this gallery). What instrument would you use and why? (It does not have to be an instrument you already know how to play.)

Mythology East and West

AMERICA

Discussion Questions

Ask students to describe the three main elements of this painting (tree, sky, and mountain). Which is the closest to the viewer? Which takes up most space on the canvas?

How do you know that O'Keeffe was not painting the landscape exactly as it appeared (exaggerated colors, ambiguous spatial relationship between the foreground tree and background mountain, etc.)?

If you could walk into this painting, where would you stand?

Can you tell what time of year or time of day it is in this painting? Why or why not?

Discuss O'Keeffe's use of only two colors. What atmosphere is created by these colors?

Notice that there is no trace of human presence in this painting. How does this contribute to the overall effect?

What sense of the New Mexican landscape is O'Keeffe trying to convey? Has she succeeded?

Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986)
Red Tree, Yellow Sky, 1952 1990.379

After getting her start as an artist in New York City, Georgia O'Keeffe found new inspiration in the desert of New Mexico. She felt that the desert was alive "even tho' it is vast and empty and untouchable—and knows no kindness with all its beauty." *Red Tree, Yellow Sky* was painted a few miles from Abiqiu at "Ghost Ranch," where O'Keeffe first stayed in 1934. She spent long summers there exploring her vision of the desert in her paintings.

In this striking painting, the jagged shapes of a weathered tree trunk fill most of the upper and left portions of the canvas; a flattopped mountain, the Pedernal, appears in the distance at the bottom. The mountain was part of the view she saw every day out her studio window, while the model for the tree trunk was a small piece of wood, no more than four inches high, that she had picked up in the desert. Each image is painted from a different point of view: the tree from below, making it look larger and more imposing; and the mountain from above, diminishing its size. As a result, the two images seem superimposed, like a collage, rather than part of continuous landscape. The harsh, unnatural colors contribute to a sense of unreality. O'Keeffe rearranged elements of the landscape around her to create a world and a mythology of her own in paint. Because the mythology is personal to the artist, each viewer must rely on careful observation to grasp the artist's intent. In O'Keeffe's world, traces of human activity are downplayed in order to focus more clearly on the ruthless beauty and power of nature.

OTHER OBJECTS IN THIS GALLERY

Georgia O'Keeffe, Deer's Skull with Pedernal, 1936 1990.432

While similar in composition to *Red Tree, Yellow Sky*, this much earlier painting is very different in color. Discuss other similarities and differences between the two.

Mythology East and West

SUGGESTIONS FOR PRE-VISIT AND POST-VISIT PROJECTS

General

Have students research and be prepared to give a short talk about one of the mythological figures the class will see during the Museum visit.

Have students read a type of myth found in several different cultures—creation myths, for example—and compare the differences and similarities. What details (geography, weather, etc.) provide information about life in one culture? What details are more universal? Afterward, have students write their own creation myths.

Orient students to the geography of the different cultures they will explore at the Museum. Focus on the different kinds of materials available to artists in each region.

Discuss the role of religion in the cultures you will explore at the Museum. Note that while many of the objects they will see are hundreds of years old, the religions they represent (Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity) are still actively practiced today. If possible, show slides of a variety of contemporary places of worship.

Design a ritual or festival in honor of a real or imagined mythological character. Would it be public or private? When and where would it be performed? What elements (objects, people, buildings, etc.) would you need?

Have students write a paper on a modern text or film of their choice that is based on a mythological theme or describes heroic deeds.

Select an object you saw during your visit to the MFA and research its role in the religion of its culture. Your research might take the form of writing, drawing, or oral presentation.

Many of the objects in the unit represented composite creatures made up of the parts of other creatures. Create your own mythological creature in a sketch and then write a story to explain your creature's birth and special powers. (Consult works that include animals, such as *Aesop's Fables*, science fiction, etc.)

Write a myth explaining a contemporary event (natural disaster or new technology) or giving the genealogy of a current celebrity.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Many of the books listed below contain detailed bibliographies.

General

Dissanayake, Ellen. *What Is Art For?* St. Louis, Mo.: Washington University Press, 1988.

Janson, H. W., and Anthony F. *History of Art for Young People.* New York: Abrams, 1992.

Milliard, Anne. *The First Civilisations: From 10,000 to 1500 B.C.* London: Usborne Publishing Ltd., 1990.

Panati, Charles. *Extraordinary Origins of Everyday Things.* New York: Harper and Row, 1987.

Selected Masterpieces of Asian Art. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1992.

Stebbins, Theodore E. Jr. *A New World: Masterpieces of American Painting 1760–1910.* Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1983.

Daily Life

Aries, Philippe, and Duby, George, eds. *A History of Private Life.* 5 Vols. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987.

Egypt's Golden Age: The Art of Living in the New Kingdom 1558–1085 B.C. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1982.

Pharaohs and Pyramids. London: Usborne Publishing Ltd., 1989.

Morley, Jacqueline. *An Egyptian Pyramid.* New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1991.

Pollitt, J. J. *Art and Experience in Classical Greece.* Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1972.

Stories from China's Past. San Francisco: The Chinese Culture Foundation of San Francisco, 1987.

Images of Power

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing.* London: British Broadcasting Corp., 1972.

Mythology

Campbell, Joseph, with Bill Moyers. *The Power of Myth.* New York: Doubleday, 1988.

Hamilton, Edith. *Mythology.* Boston: Little, Brown, 1950.

Hamilton, Virginia. *In the Beginning: Creation Stories from Around the World.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988.

Mummies and Magic: The Funerary Arts of Ancient Egypt. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1988.

Wilson, Nancy Ross. *Three Ways of Asian Wisdom.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966.